



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**NARRATIVE PROPAGATION IN RUSSIA:  
A STUDY IN CONTINUITY**

by

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March 2016

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**NARRATIVE PROPAGATION IN RUSSIA:  
A STUDY IN CONTINUITY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite uncertainty and difficulties in the modern Russian Federation, the regime enjoys massive popularity among its people, with approval ratings unrivaled in the past twenty-five years. This is a result of a carefully constructed narrative, pieced together using the strongest elements of Soviet and Tsarist propaganda, and enforced with censorship techniques borrowed from Stalin.

This thesis establishes the continuity in both the propagated narrative and the censorship techniques employed by the Tsars, Stalin, and Putin. It also demonstrates an evolution of Putin's narrative, showing new innovations that have permitted the leader to maintain a strong level of support from the Russian populace, while silencing dissent.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is February in Sochi. A blue mural covers a wall with the words, “Sochi 2014,” written in Cyrillic and Latin script, framed next to abstract artwork. Russian President Vladimir Putin has gone to great lengths to ensure that this event displays the unity and strength of the Russian Federation, fifteen years after his rise to power. Such elegant murals are a commonplace element of this campaign.<sup>1</sup>

On this day, however, five women and two men walk briskly toward the mural to film a different kind of message. They are armed with microphones and a small digital video camera. The group rapidly dons ski masks and commences a protest performance. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, lead singer of the provocatively named band “Pussy Riot,” stands out front; she is wearing a blue ski mask and a pink top. She begins head-banging, as the group starts chanting, in Russian, “Putin will teach you to love your country.”<sup>2</sup>

Apparently, uniformed Cossack militia members are already standing by—they arrive within seconds to restore Putin’s order. One of the militia members hoses Tolokonnikova’s face with pepper spray. She screams, but quickly resumes chanting with the rest of the group. Bystanders capture the event on video as the Cossacks produce horsewhips, which they swing in vicious arcs at the band members and a masked cameraman. The protesters continue their efforts, even as the ski masks are ripped from their faces. As Tolokonnikova is hurled to the pavement, a jacket is thrown over her, and lashes rain down on her defenseless body.<sup>3</sup>

### A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

This bizarre, brutal confrontation is but one of many conflicts within Russia between two opposing narratives—a civil war of ideologies in which Putin seems to hold most of the advantages. The demise of the Soviet Union opened Russia to Western

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<sup>1</sup> *The Telegraph*, “Pussy Riot Attacked with Whips by Police at Sochi,” YouTube video, 19 February 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivT-I-yxtdY>; citation applies to entire paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; citation applies to entire paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

innovation and culture, bringing significant change to Russia's political and technological landscape in the past few decades. The Internet has linked the people of Russia to the outside world as never before, creating a global awareness that was impossible in the early days of the Russian Federation, let alone the Soviet Union. On the other hand, this exposure seems to bring such traditional values as Russian Orthodoxy and allegiance to the state under attack by Western ideas, including liberal globalization and moral ambiguity. Putin's regime has had to quell dissension from within, even as it faces scathing criticism from without.

Even so, the Russian Federation has enjoyed great domestic success in propagating its own narrative, as a democracy, a moral bastion, and a legitimate heir to the Soviet Union's political clout. Communication is the key to Russia's image, and the current government has employed modern and traditional means to shape that image masterfully. This thesis will examine to what extent Putin's narrative and censorship controls mark a continuity with policies and tools employed by the Soviet Union and Tsarist Russia.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

Putin's local support base grows seemingly more loyal, almost to the point of fanaticism. His mastery of the message is evident. In the unswerving Putin line, the riots that resulted in the March 2014 overthrow of Ukraine's government are decried as a fascist movement, while the transvestite winner of the same year's Eurovision talent contest is deemed an abomination. Liberalism and tolerance are set aside by the people of Russia in favor of flag-waving and patriotism, and yet to label these changes in national sentiment "totalitarianism," "fascism," or "imperialism" would be a gross oversimplification.

Narrative control, including but not limited to propaganda, is a central concept in understanding the nature of Putin's regime. The Russian people have proven quite capable of confiscating power from governing bodies that fail to maintain legitimacy, both in 1917 and in 1991. Putin's ability to pull the strings of state, media, church, and business represents the pinnacle of Russian centralization, allowing the president to

perpetuate an image of power and moral ascendancy regardless of the realities of Russian life. Western readers, particularly those who deal in Eurasian affairs, should be equipped with an understanding of these tools and their use. Regular incidents involving the suppression of Pussy Riot stand in sharp contrast with the positive image of Russia as world power and host of the Sochi Olympic games; these opposing forces provide two relevant case studies that demonstrate the dual nature of Putin's control.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Establishing continuity levels between Tsarist, Stalinist, and Putinist Russian narratives will require a broad base of literature. This continuity can be divided into four themes: the Russian Orthodox Church, the concept of the Great State, Russianness, and the leader's Cult of Personality. For a state to establish a narrative, it must not only deliberately propagate the narrative but also suppress opposing viewpoints—censorship plays a key role, acting as the final continuous aspect of the Russian narrative. Previous literature does not address the narrative in these terms, but rather focuses on propaganda, censorship, and nationalism.

#### **1. Propaganda and Censorship**

A central aspect of narrative manipulation is modern propaganda, first employed in pamphlet form by British forces in World War I. Propaganda is a psychological effort to persuade (or coerce) through various means of communication, whether by pamphlet, book, television episode, or Internet blog. International communications scholar Philip M. Taylor presents propaganda as a tool that can be employed in the pursuit of both power and military victory. According to Taylor, wartime propaganda is “a weapon of no less significance than swords or guns or bombs. But it cannot normally be divorced from military realities.”<sup>4</sup> In this respect successful propaganda is much like a convincing lie—it needs to contain enough truth for the recipient to buy into it completely.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda, Third Edition* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3–5.

Russian historian Peter Kenez adopts a more encompassing definition: “Propaganda is nothing more than the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hopes of affecting people’s thinking, emotions, and thereby behavior.”<sup>6</sup> Kenez goes on to note that propaganda is an inescapable reality of today’s world—whenever a person objects to propaganda, the objection is not to the fact that propaganda was employed, so much as to either the message conveyed or the means by which it was conveyed. The definitions employed by Taylor and Kenez are both relevant when applied to the propaganda employed by both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation.

At the other end of narrative manipulation is censorship. Kenez argues that even before the October Revolution of 1917, censorship in Russia “was as old as educated public opinion.”<sup>7</sup> Censorship was pervasive in Tsarist Russia, extending not only to political sore spots such as the 1890s famine, but also any derogatory comment at the expense of the Turkish Sultan’s wives.<sup>8</sup> These practices were haphazard and clumsy in the Russian Empire, but they were much more effectively employed by the Soviet Union, as evidenced by the successful cover-up of the Great Famine in Soviet Russia and Ukraine in the 1930s. Putin’s narrative controls are not a new invention, but represent an evolution of practices and ideas from the Soviet Union and the Tsarist Russia. Propaganda and censorship play key roles in Russian narrative manipulation, as evidenced by state-controlled television. In the words of Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova, Putin employs “his unchallenged authority over the media... to use television as a propaganda tool with which to promote his agenda of rebuilding popular belief in a militarily strong, self-confident, stable and united Russia.”<sup>9</sup>

The Internet is still a very new medium, especially in Russia where it was not widespread until after Putin’s rise to power in 1999. For Putin, Internet communication represents a powerful new propaganda tool, but also a medium that is very difficult to

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 22–23.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin’s Russia: Remote Control* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 10.

effectively censor. The Russian government maintains its own section of YouTube to propagate its own agenda and to encourage Russian participation in state-sponsored organizations and movements, such as *Nashi*, a youth movement that encourages social activism while painting the West in a negative light. Of course, dissident parties also upload their own material, such as Pussy Riot. As YouTube is hosted outside of the Russian Federation, there is little the government can do to suppress these videos once they have been uploaded.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Russian Nationalism

Russian nationalism is one of the central concepts of Russia's modern narrative, but many eminent scholars argue that the people of Russia have never possessed a nationality, or at least not one based upon a common culture, but rather a make-shift national identity constructed by the state in order to further its own agenda. On the other hand, the proper definition of nationalism itself is a point of contention. In *Ethnonationalism*, Walker Connor describes the nation as an "intangible" community sharing a "psychological bond," while the state is simply "the major political subdivision of the globe."<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* defines the nation as "an imagined political community...both inherently limited and sovereign...always conceived as a deep, horizontal companionship."<sup>12</sup> Most telling, however, is Hagen Schulze's description of nationalism in *States, Nations and Nationalism*: "Nationalism is the secular faith of the industrial age. The new state was not sanctioned by god, but by the nation."<sup>13</sup>

Geoffrey Hosking's book, *Russia: People and Empire*, asserts that the Russian people never had a nation so much as an imperialist state. Russification, a Tsarist state-building tool, was perhaps the closest thing Russia had to nationalism, consisting of three

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<sup>10</sup> Birgit Beumers, Stephen Hutchings, and Natalia Rulyova, "Introduction," in *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals*, ed. Birgit Beumers, Stephen Hutchings, and Natalia Rulyova (New York: Routledge, 2011), 14–17.

<sup>11</sup> Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 92.

<sup>12</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006), 6–7.

<sup>13</sup> Hagen Schulze, *States, Nations and Nationalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), 158.

elements: Russian language, membership in the Orthodox Church, and loyalty to the Tsar. Ultimately, Russification was a blunt tool used to convert non-Russians, and failed to inspire any real sense of a shared identity among Russians themselves—Russia was still defined by its physical borders and not by its people.<sup>14</sup>

Martin Malia's history, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, describes in some depth the greatest use of Russian nationalism in the twentieth century: the Great Patriotic War (or World War II). Stalin employed elements of traditional Russian nationalism to bolster the fighting morale of his troops. He did so by loosening the government suppression of organized religion, particularly the Russian Orthodox Church, and by heaping high praise upon the Russian people, essentially placing them at the political center of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup>

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

The predicted outcome of the research is a strong continuity between Putin's narrative and those of the Soviet Union and Tsarist Russia. Russia's own brand of nationalism has not changed much since the days of the tsars, with the exception of the Soviet era, which saw intermittent suppression of the Orthodox Church. The emphasis on being perceived as a great power, on par with the powers of the West, is also nothing new. Putin's image in sympathetic media bears a strong resemblance to Stalin's cult of personality, particularly in the level to which Putin has established control over that media.

The message might be old, but the methods will have certainly changed in many respects. The complete control that Stalin enjoyed is impossible to maintain in the information age—anyone with a smartphone can upload video to millions or even billions of viewers in mere seconds. Modern media allows dissident messages, such as that of Pussy Riot, but also works in Putin's favor, perhaps because he possesses the cunning to present a consistent personal image in every situation where he might be seen in public.

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<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 367, 397; citation applies to entire paragraph.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 286–87.

Finally, it is possible that the propaganda employed by Putin's government will be more subtle than Soviet propaganda, primarily because of greater exposure in Russia to the liberal ideology of the West.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

In a general sense, the thesis compares and contrasts the communication controls used by the Russian Federation under Putin with those used by Stalin and the Tsars, with an emphasis on propaganda and censorship. Research topics for the first section of each chapter will involve Russian and Soviet history, drawing comparisons in the last chapter to books and articles about the Russian Federation.

The second section of each chapter will contain a period case study. Putin's Russia will actually employ two recent case studies: the Pussy Riot band (a dissident narrative) and the Sochi Olympics (the mainstream narrative). While the older case studies will be drawn primarily from books and articles, the modern case studies will entail the perusal of a large number of articles and videos, some of which will be propaganda and some of which will be news coverage. There may be some difficulty with the credibility of sources—all news carries a certain amount of editorial bias, and separating propaganda from objective reporting may prove difficult.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

Each chapter will focus on the propagated narrative and censorship in one of three distinct regimes of Russia: Tsarism, Stalinism, and Putinism. The narratives will be divided into four major themes: the relationship of the state to the Russian Orthodox Church (the treatment of other religions plays a role in some cases), the idea of the Great State, the concept of Russianness, and the cult of personality around the state leaders. Censorship will act as a fifth point of study, providing a final opportunity for comparison and contrast between the regimes. Finally, a case study at the end of each chapter will show examples of the regime's propaganda and censorship at work.

The Tsarist case study will examine the Russo-Japanese war. The Russo-Japanese war was a military failure that illustrated the weakness of the propaganda model that

Russia employed at the time. The racist portrayal of the Japanese as weak monkeys only hurt Russia when the Japanese were successful in warfare. Ultimately, the humiliating conflict helped erode the legitimacy of the Tsardom itself, leading to the fall of the empire in World War I.

Collectivization will be at the center of the Stalinist case study. The first Five-Year Plan resulted in widespread starvation in the farmlands of Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Russia, and Soviet Afghanistan. Stalin's propaganda and censorship were effective in suppressing the stories of famine in affected areas, to the point where Western authorities largely dismissed reports of the food shortages as rumor and speculation.

Putinism will contain two linked but contrasting case studies: Pussy Riot and the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Pussy Riot is a protest band that has borne the brunt of censorship employed by Putin's regime. While Putin has not openly directed any attacks against the band, the state has taken significant action against them. Besides the beatings received at their Sochi demonstration, Pussy Riot's members have been detained, harassed, beaten, and even imprisoned for "hooliganism." Their treatment under Putin's regime is hardly unique. Journalists, environmentalists, political candidates, and other musical artists have paid a high toll for dissident viewpoints.

The 2014 Sochi Olympics will be the second case study. The event stands in stark contrast to the Pussy Riot case study, in that it represents the narrative of the current Russian state. The "Gateway to the Future" campaign attempted to show a united Russia, "a country that is committed to equality and celebrates diversity," according to the summary for one of its advertisements.<sup>16</sup> The opening and closing ceremonies connect Russia with accessible themes: Love ("Luba"), Russian achievement (with nods to the Soviet space program), and Russian culture.<sup>17</sup> Russia even allowed gay and lesbian athletes to compete, in spite of its own strict internal laws prohibiting non-traditional

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<sup>16</sup> Igor Vasilevsky, "Sochi 2014 – 'Gateway To The Future,'" YouTube video, 4 January 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXdJaZZPqgo>.

<sup>17</sup> Video found on *Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics*, accessed 6 September 2014, <http://www.olympic.org/sochi-2014-winter-olympics>.



sexual orientation.<sup>18</sup> The image of a modern, united, moral, and cultured Russian people operating within the bounds of an enlightened democracy was the primary message of the Sochi Olympics. The contrast between the mainstream and dissident narratives of Russia is the primary focus of the second part of the analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> “Putin Says Gays Welcome at Sochi Winter Olympics,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 28 October 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/putin-lgbt-sochi-olympics-gay-homosexual/25150741.html>.

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## **II. THE TSARIST RUSSIAN NARRATIVE**

Russia's national consciousness was born under the Tsars. As Russia expanded into new territory in the sixteenth century, Orthodoxy was the primary factor in being considered a loyal Russian subject. Over time, other factors coalesced into a loose national image of Russia, including the four major themes of this thesis: adherence to Russian Orthodoxy, Russia as a Great Power, the idea of Russianness (beyond religion), and the evolution of a primitive Cult of Personality around the figure of the Tsar. The weaknesses of this national consciousness came to the forefront during and after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, ultimately contributing to the Russian Revolution.

### **A. THE TSARIST NARRATIVE**

Ancient Rus was a poor land for farming, and wholly unsuitable for individual farmers, primarily due to the brevity of the harvest season. Its Slavic occupants were a tribal people, working collectively with blood relations under a family patriarch. The poor quality of the land and the tightly knit farming communities did not encourage the emergence of monarchy, but eventually Norman traders brought along their own political structures. Their earliest sovereigns were referred to as princes; unlike the Western monarchs, however, their political power extended only to the lands they personally owned.<sup>19</sup>

It was not a tsar, but a grand prince of Kiev who took the first major steps toward the tsarist narrative by converting his realm to monotheism.

#### **1. 988–1917: Orthodoxy under the Tsars**

Vladimir the Great is credited with adopting Eastern Orthodoxy as the state religion of Kievan Rus, and consequently the state religion of the Russian Empire and Russian Federation as well. The ruler of Kiev decided that his state required a more advanced religion than its pagan gods, given the European shift from polytheism to monotheism. Vladimir invited ambassadors from the various monotheistic faiths. He

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 11–31.

turned down Judaism first, arguing, “If God dispersed the Jews in foreign lands because of their sins, should we bring a similar destiny on our heads?”<sup>20</sup> Vladimir denied Islam due in no small part to its rejection of alcohol; the prince remarked, “Drinking...is the joy of the Russes, and we cannot exist without that pleasure.”<sup>21</sup> The ruler had to choose between the two major types of Christianity (Greek and Latin), and dispatched emissaries to attend Mass with each faith and report their findings. The reports described the Latin ceremony as dull and tedious, while the Greek mass received glowing praise: “In St. Sophia Cathedral, it was so beautiful. We did not know whether we were on the earth or in Heaven during the service.”<sup>22</sup> Hearing this description, Vladimir decided that he and the whole of the nation would convert to Greek Orthodoxy.<sup>23</sup>

**a.       *The Third Rome***

The Russian Orthodox Church became truly Russian following two other formative events: the fall of Constantinople and the collapse of the Golden Horde. Freed from any obligation to Byzantium and the Khanate, Russian rulers adopted the title *tsar*, derived from *caesar*. Ivan IV, of the Riurikid dynasty, formalized the title in 1549, styling himself “Tsar of all Russia.”<sup>24</sup> This title implied not only imperial sovereignty but also authority over all Orthodox Christianity. Moscow was even referred to by some as the “Third Rome,” suggesting that the Russian Orthodox Church (and therefore the tsar) was the legitimate successor to the authority of Saint Peter over all of Christendom.<sup>25</sup> The adoption of this title is famously enacted by the eponymous protagonist in the Soviet film, *Ivan the Terrible, Part I*: “Two Romes fell: the third—Moscow—stands. Never shall there be a fourth.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dmitri Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Anna Reid, *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Pospelovsky, *Orthodox Church*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivan the Terrible, Part I*, 12:17-12:28, directed by Sergei Eisenstien (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 1982), DVD.

With the death of Theodore Ivanovich, the last tsar of the Riurikid dynasty, Russia was plunged into a chaotic period known as the Time of Troubles (1598-1613). During this period, Russia endured two imposter tsars and an invasion by Poland and Sweden. The power struggle ended with the death of the imposters, and the accession of Michael Romanov to tsardom. His title of “Great Sovereign” was shared with his father, Patriarch Filaret, who ruled Russia in a practical sense until his death in 1634. In 1652, the newly anointed Patriarch Nikon also claimed the title of “Great Sovereign,” uncontested by Tsar Alexei I, the son of Tsar Michael I. Patriarch Nikon’s political clout often rivaled that of the tsar, and eventually he would be condemned and imprisoned by a synod of Orthodox officials. The patriarchy had established itself as a political rival to the tsardom, and tsars do not suffer rivals.<sup>27</sup>

**b.      *The Patriarch of the Sword***

Patriarch Adrian was elected patriarch in 1690; a proud clergyman, he equated his word with the authority of Christ: “Whoever... ignores my words, ignores the words... of our Lord God.” Tsar Peter I chafed at this political rivalry, and the Anglican and Lutheran churches of England and Prussia inspired him to seize closer control of the church. Upon the death of the Patriarch Adrian, the tsar did not appoint a successor; in 1721, Peter abolished the Patriarchate entirely. Instead, he published a document titled *The Spiritual Regulation*, which made the case for absolute patriarchal authority over state and church. According to the historian Geoffrey Hosking, “when a gathering of bishops requested Peter to allow them to elect another Patriarch, he replied by banging the *Spiritual Regulation* down on the table in front of them and barking out, ‘This is your spiritual Patriarch, and those who object to him will (taking a dagger from his pocket) get to know the Patriarch of the Sword!’”<sup>28</sup>

Under Peter and his successive tsars, the state took control of church property and finances. The Russian Orthodox Church lost most of its wealth and political power, and

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<sup>27</sup> Pospelovsky, *Orthodox Church*, 66–77.

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 226–228 (quote on 228).

the clergy were largely impoverished. Unlike the reformations of the Church of England, however, Peter's reforms did not involve a major re-working of the faith. Prayer books and vernacular Bibles were not made available to the people. More importantly, the tsardom still derived its legitimacy from divine mandate, not secular sovereignty. Peter's reforms were effective in removing the patriarch as a potential political rival, but it also undermined an institution that provided the tsar with legitimacy.<sup>29</sup>

The reforms were a blow from which the Russian Orthodox Church would never fully recover. The Church recovered a small amount of power with the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905 and the subsequent revolution of 1905, as these events forced Tsar Nicholas II to acquiesce to a number of political concessions including the establishment of the Duma.<sup>30</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church gained a limited political voice through its six seats in the State Council.<sup>31</sup> The Duma under the tsar held little true power, however, and the political bankruptcy of the church was a contributing factor to the success of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.<sup>32</sup>

## **2. Great Russia**

Before the reign of Peter the Great, Russia was defined by tsar and church—in a sense, the ruler and the land were one political entity. The bureaucratic underpinnings of the empire were inconsistent and understaffed, though they were able to collect enough revenue to support the defense of the Russian state, for the most part. Peter the Great imported many Western ideas in much-needed reforms to the state bureaucracy, religion, and military; in doing so, he helped create the idea of the Great Russian State.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 230–231.

<sup>30</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk, NY: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), 17.

<sup>31</sup> Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 425.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 230–231, 245.

<sup>33</sup> Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 128–29.

a. *Russia under Peter the Great*

Peter's victories in the Great Northern War with Sweden (1700–1721) provided him with the political legitimacy needed to enact changes throughout his empire. Peter's territorial expansion was modest in terms of land mass—the Russian state expanded to three times its original size between 1462 and 1689, taking control of much of northern Asia. Still, the expansions he executed were ambitious in their own right: a port in the Baltics (St. Petersburg) and a port on the Black Sea. Peter conquered Azov in 1696, giving him access to the Black Sea, but lost it in 1711 (to be conquered later by Catherine II). He acquired Estonia and Livonia from Sweden in 1721, allowing him to create his Baltic port. Peter's military triumphs against modern European powers gave Russia a new standing among nations.<sup>34</sup>

His reforms redefined the Russian cultural elite, while his victories cemented the image of a Great Russia with strong territorial sovereignty. Peter created a secular state administration by which motivated servants of the state could advance their social rank through service. This concept was codified in the Table of Ranks, based on military service, but permitting people from all walks of government service to advance even into the nobility. Peter's reforms also subjugated the church to the empire completely, even going so far as to establish a new capital city at St. Petersburg. The new capital was to act as a secular seat of power, as Hosking explains: “This was no ‘Third Rome,’ but a ‘New Amsterdam.’”<sup>35</sup>

Peter also pushed the Russian concept of greatness that is traditionally associated with military triumphs and territorial expansion. In addition to his military reforms, Peter I adopted Saint Alexander Nevsky for use as a great Russian historical figure, ordering his remains moved to St. Petersburg, the new, secular capital of the Russian Empire.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Atlas of World History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Patrick O'Brien (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 148–49).

<sup>35</sup> Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 81–88 (quote on 86).

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Nevsky was a Great Prince of Novgorod and a Saint of the Russian Orthodox Church, lauded not only for his military victories but for his successful political dealings with the Mongols in eleventh-century Russia; Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 82; Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 59–60.

Peter also used Nevsky's successful campaigns against Germans, Swedes, and Lithuanians as justification for Russian claims on the Baltic states.<sup>37</sup>

### ***b. Victory or Humiliation***

To a large extent, the level of national pride and the perceived “greatness” of the Russian state has hinged on military victories since the reign of Peter. Perceived failure, on the other hand, deprives Russia of this vital part of its identity, resulting in what scholar Astrid Tuminez refers to as “national humiliation.”<sup>38</sup> She points to two major humiliations under the Tsarist regime: the Crimean War of 1856 and the Russo-Japanese War from 1904–1905 (the Russo-Japanese War is particularly instructive in both its pre-war propaganda and also the post-war consequences of a dismal defeat, to be explored as a case study, later in this chapter).<sup>39</sup>

Russia's defeat in the Crimean War was a particularly nasty shock for the empire. The future Tsar Alexander II witnessed as Russian serf armies were destroyed by free French and British troops. Russian lack of infrastructure, particularly in rail, resulted in costly logistical shortfalls. Russia was in no real danger of being conquered, but the war's cost was staggering, bankrupting the state. Upon the death of Tsar Nicholas, Alexander II conceded the war in the disadvantageous Treaty of Paris. Russia could no longer claim to be the same great power that had defeated Napoleon—its infrastructure was lacking and its culture had fallen behind. While advanced European states enjoyed the benefits of nationalism, Russia was still an empire running upon the backs of serfs.

## **3. Russianness**

Schulze tells us that “Nationalism is the secular faith of the industrial age. The new state was not sanctioned by god, but by the nation.”<sup>40</sup> Tsarist Russia had certain

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<sup>37</sup> Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 82.

<sup>38</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–12.

<sup>40</sup> Schulze, *States, Nations and Nationalism*, 158, as previously quoted in the Literature Review of Chapter I.



elements of secularism, thanks in no small part to Peter I's reforms, but the Tsar continued to rule by divine mandate, up to the Revolution of 1917. In a sense, Russian nationalism had a stunted growth, as ethnic Russians were always Russian subjects, first and foremost.

**a. *Russian Literature Emerges***

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson develops the idea that the “convergence of capitalism and print... created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which... set the stage for the modern nation.”<sup>41</sup> Under Peter I, the Russian court and aristocracy was based on other European models, going so far as to use French and German in official court matters. Intellectual discourse, both by written correspondence and salon discussion, was patterned on the French Enlightenment.

The introduction and use of foreign words created linguistic chaos in the Russian vernacular. Catherine the Great sought to organize and clarify the language, establishing a standard for the population of the state as a whole. The first Russian academy was founded in 1783, a clear attempt to formalize the Russian language. By 1794, the first official Russian dictionary was produced, with grammar rules to follow in 1802. These changes only took place at the peak of Russian society, however—very little if any impact was made upon the typical Russian serf.<sup>42</sup>

**b. *Traditional Definitions of Russian Subjects***

The failure of nationalism to take root in Tsarist Russia could readily be attributed to policies that placed ethnic Russians at an economic or social disadvantage. Even in the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire was host to a broad variety of religious and ethnic groups. The state's early attempts to define and categorize non-Russians made use of several factors, including language, religion, geography, and heredity. Nevertheless, there was a certain amount of oversimplification. In the article “Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects,” scholar Michael Khodarkovsky explains the terms of distinction:

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<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 287–88.

A well-known example is the Slavic word *nemets* (lit. “one who speaks unclearly”), which referred to an outsider, a foreigner in general, before it acquired the more specific designation of “German.” *Inzomets* (lit. “a person of a different land”) referred to either foreigners from Western Europe or the natives of Siberia... Two other terms, *inodorets* (lit. “of a different kin”) and *inoverets* (lit. “of a different faith”), came into usage reserved for the non-Christian peoples residing in the newly conquered territories in the east and the south.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of the Russian populace could not accurately be referred to as citizens so much as subjects—Russian serfdom was not abolished until 1861. By 1897, the Russian Empire had expanded to such an extent that it contained over 128 million subjects; more than half of these, however, were of a non-Russian ethnicity. To make discontent among even ethnic Russians worse, non-Russian subjects often received special exemptions and considerations from the state. Under these conditions, a stunted growth of nationalism could only be expected from the ethnic Russian subjects.<sup>44</sup>

### *c. Pan-Slavism*

Russian pan-Slavism was an irredentist movement, primarily emerging as a response to the empire’s humiliating defeat in the Crimean War. At the root of the movement was the contention that Slavs were not only superior to their violent Western rivals, but also morally ascendant. In his 1869 work *Russia and Empire*, Nikolai Danilevskii argued that the Romano-Germanic period of dominance was decaying from wanton materialism and internal corruption, and would soon give way to the righteous Slavs:

These traits of the Russian people’s character show that power holds little fascination for us... Russia is almost the only state that never had (and in all likelihood never will have) a political revolution—that is, a revolution

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Khodarkovsky, “Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borders and Peoples, 1700–1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 9–15 (quote in 15).

<sup>44</sup> Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 30–31.

having the goal of limiting the dimensions of power... and banishing the rightful tsarist dynasty and replacing it with something else.<sup>45</sup>

Danilevskii went on to claim that the cultural and political achievements of the West (“Athens, Alexandria, and Rome”) would merge with the religious ascendancy of Jerusalem and “Tsargrad,” finding their ultimate combination in the Russian state, as “across the broad plains of Slavdom, all these streams must flow into one vast sea.”<sup>46</sup> The tenets of pan-Slavism eventually gained the support of the Russian state, and amassed considerable support to the successful Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 (although it should not be overlooked that Russia took possession of several territories in the Caucasus, and pan-Slavism was likely a convenient rallying cry, especially as the Russian state never officially adopted its policies). Nevertheless, despite its purported ties to the common Slav, Russian pan-Slavism did little to establish a real sense of nationality among the lower echelons of Russian society.<sup>47</sup>

#### *d. Russification*

Russification was a set of practices designed to create ethnic, cultural, and linguistic cohesion among subjects of the tsars. Hosking describes Russification under Alexander II as an “attempt to inspire among all peoples of the empire a subjective sense of *belonging* to Russia, whether through the habit of using the Russian language, through reverence for Russia’s past, its culture and traditions, or through conversion to the Orthodox faith.”<sup>48</sup> These cultural shifts did not generally supplant one’s original ethnic identity, but acted as a supplementary blanket identity.<sup>49</sup> The movement ultimately backfired—non-Russian groups reacted negatively to the movement, increasing the cultural gulf, while Russian subjects remained largely unaffected.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Nikolai Iakovlevich Danilevskii, *Russia and Europe: The Slavic World’s Political and Cultural Relations with the Germanic-Roman West*, trans. Stephen M. Woodburn (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2013), 418.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>47</sup> Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 371–73.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 397.

#### **4. Cult of Personality**

No Russian tsar adopted a modern personality cult; while Ivan IV and Peter I took great strides to consolidate power, even their considerable authority was considered a mandate from the divine. Alexander III and Nicholas II, the penultimate and ultimate Romanov tsars (respectively), came close enough to the model of a modern personality cult to establish a foundation, providing a model for comparison with later Soviet and Russian leaders.

##### ***a. Images and Icons of the Tsar***

Since the reign of Peter I, the Russian court employed French and German language and practices. Not surprisingly, the cult of the tsar was at least partially adopted from a French ruler. French Emperor Napoleon III had the first modern personality cult, based upon popular sovereignty within a secular society, a central father figure, a mass following, the mass-production and distribution of the message, and its perpetuation within a fairly closed society. His reign was marked by a mixture of spectacle and myth, and the emperor was presented to his people as being not only “for the people” through his charitable works, but also “of the people” in his marriage to a relatively minor noble woman.<sup>51</sup>

Tsar Peter I had established a secular state with himself as the paternal center, but his reign was never based upon popular sovereignty; nor were the attributes of his dominion spread through a mass-produced and uniform propaganda system. More importantly, there was a vast gulf between the reigning tsar (especially Peter’s successors, who were of generally Germanic and Polish descent) and the Russian serf. It was Tsar Alexander III who first attempted to bridge that gap, presenting the image of a tsardom that was both Russian and Orthodox. Images of the tsar and his family were mass-produced via the press and mass-circulated throughout Russia. In addition to the press, the tsar appeared in portraits (including one by Ilya Repin; see Figure 1) and public ceremonies. While Alexander neither achieved a true cult of personality nor a meaningful

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<sup>51</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 3–5.

connection with the populace of his empire, the attempt to create such an image was a marked move in that direction.<sup>52</sup>



Figure 1. Alexander III receiving subjects at Petrovsky Palace, Moscow, by Ilya Repin<sup>53</sup>

***b. Tsar Nicholas II***

With Alexander III's sudden illness and demise in 1894, Nicholas II assumed the tsardom. His own quasi-cult of tsardom was distinct from his predecessor in that "he sought direct spiritual bonds with the people and greatly expanded the pious, religious component introduced by Alexander III," according to historian Jan Plamper.<sup>54</sup> The new tsar sought to propagate the image of a direct connection between himself and the divine, outside of the confines of Russian Orthodoxy. In particular, the public relationship

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<sup>52</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 5–6.

<sup>53</sup> Source: Ilya Repin, *Aleksander III Receiving Rural District Elders in the Yard of Petrovsky Palace in Moscow*, *Wikimedia Commons*, painted 1885–1886, last accessed 28 February 2016, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander\\_III\\_reception\\_by\\_Repin.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_III_reception_by_Repin.jpg).

<sup>54</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 6.

between the royal family and the mystic Rasputin was highly publicized. For the first time, the Russian Empire allowed the visage of Nicholas to not only be displayed, but to be featured prominently in print, cinema, plays, and even stamps; see Figure 2. Nicholas also sought to publicly discredit his political rivals as enemies of the people, a theme that would repeat itself in both the Soviet and post-Soviet regimes.<sup>55</sup>



Figure 2. *Portrait of Emperor Nicholas II of Russia*, painted by Ernest Lipgart, and official seven-kopek stamp of Nicholas II<sup>56</sup>

This political gambit eventually backfired disastrously, stripping the tsar figure of its place above the everyday politics of Russian government. The perception of the tsar aligned against the Duma actually helped create a more level political playing field, manufacturing true political rivalry where none had previously existed. In essence, Nicholas helped weaken his own political legitimacy to the point that it was unable to withstand repeated military failure, ultimately leading to the Russian Revolution and bringing about the collapse of the Tsarist regime.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 6–7.

<sup>56</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, color plate 10, 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–9.

## 5. Censorship

Censorship regulations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century proscribed pre-censorship for most publications, exempting only books and selected periodicals. Forbidden topics widely varied, from current political matters (such as the 1890s famine) to the reputation of the Turkish Sultan's wives (as previously mentioned). These censorship policies were ostensibly put in hand to defend the naïve folk of the Empire from subversive materials. Reflecting this justification, scrutiny fell harder on short publications such as leaflets, while voluminous books attracted little notice. The lopsided application of censorship resulted in some authors deliberately extending their works so that they might be published with greater ease.<sup>58</sup>

In the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution, the power of the state to enforce censorship was greatly diminished. The practice of pre-censorship almost disappeared altogether in 1905, and was eventually supplanted by post-publication censorship. While a publication could be shut down, or an editor imprisoned (or fined), the government could no longer prevent the dissemination of divergent ideas. Instead, the censorship apparatus of the state found itself operating in a purely reactive posture.<sup>59</sup>

### B. CASE STUDY: THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR, 1904–1905

To Tsar Nicholas II, the Russo-Japanese War was supposed to be a mere sideshow, an easy victory that would put the Japanese Empire back in its place. Instead, the war fully demonstrated the bankruptcy of the Russian Empire's narrative. The Russian Orthodox Church, subjugated to the state since the reign of Peter the Great, had little agency beyond accompanying the poorly-disciplined troops in a vain effort to boost morale. Russia suffered from a racial superiority complex that led them to underestimate a dangerous foe; each defeat at the hand of the Japanese led to fresh feelings of humiliation. Russia's national pride had not yet recovered from the Crimean War, and the need to be a great state led the Tsar to take part in a war for which Russia was unprepared. Worse, the Tsarist proto-cult of personality surrounded a man who was ill-

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<sup>58</sup> Kenez, *Birth of the Propaganda State*, 22–23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–24.

suitied for leadership. These factors helped bring about a lopsided conflict, in which Japan's strengths could be brought fully to bear upon Russia's weaknesses.

### **1. Pre-war Narrative: Self-Deception**

The Tsar initially thought to check Japanese expansion. The Russian Empire intervened in the Japanese invasion of Manchuria through diplomatic means in 1895, but quickly turned around to seize Port Arthur in 1898, angering the Japanese. In 1900, Russia invaded Manchuria, with troops erecting Orthodox crosses as a symbol of conquest while slaughtering the occupants, including women and children. Count Sergei Witte, an influential policy maker for both Nicholas II and his father, writes of the latter Tsar's reaction to complaints from his foreign minister, "His Majesty was gracious to the minister, but often interrupted him, saying that, after all, the Asiatics deserved the lesson that they had been taught."<sup>60</sup>

As late as 1903, Japanese envoys sought to reconcile with the Russians.<sup>61</sup> Nicholas II wavered on the issue, but was eventually convinced by officials that conceding to the Japanese was beneath his empire.<sup>62</sup> An indecisive tsar, he was plagued by self-doubt and distraught at the burden of leadership; but he believed that God had appointed him as the rightful and absolute ruler of Russia.<sup>63</sup> At one point he made the bold assertion that "there would be no war because he did not wish it," according to scholars Denis and Peggy Warner.<sup>64</sup>

In 1904, it should have been clear to Russian authorities that war with Japan was inevitable. The Japanese Empire assessed Russian occupation of Korea as a substantial security threat; the rational move was to strike Russia hard and fast.<sup>65</sup> Tsar Nicholas II

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<sup>60</sup> Denis Warner and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War 1904–1905* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2004), 121.

<sup>61</sup> David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "The Russo-Japanese War," in *The Military History of Tsarist Russia*, ed. Frederick W. Kagan and Robin Higham (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 184–85.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 184–85.

<sup>63</sup> Warner and Warner, *Tide at Sunrise*, 67.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.



was remarkably ill-informed about the threat, referring to the Japanese as monkeys.<sup>66</sup> The foolhardy belief in Slavic superiority over the Asiatic “yellow peril” was evident in pre-war propaganda. The Japanese were often portrayed as insignificant, compared to huge representatives of the Russian military (see Figures 3 and 4). At one point Nicholas made the bold assertion that “there would be no war because he did not wish it,” according to scholars Denis and Peggy Warner.<sup>67</sup> The Russian military leaned on a sense of overwhelming superiority—one could even argue hubris.<sup>68</sup>

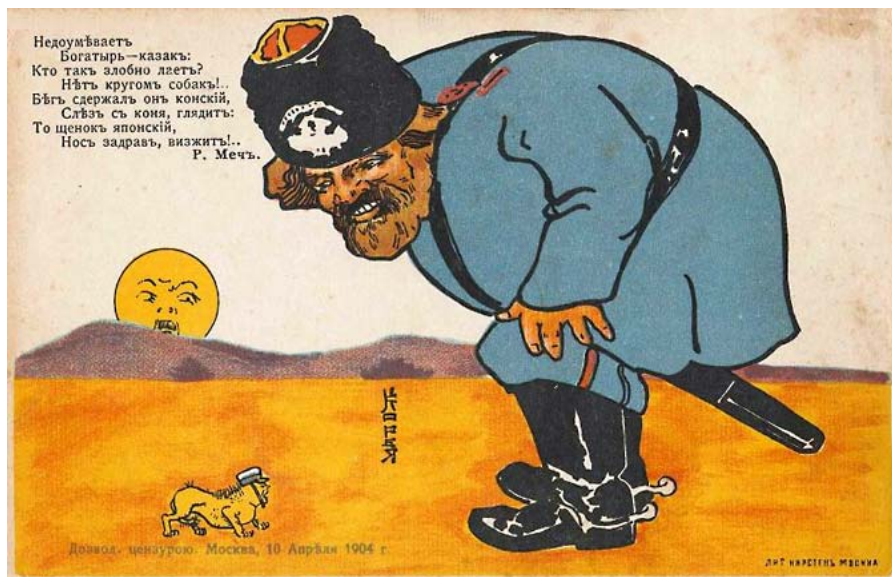


Figure 3. 1904 postcard showing a Russian soldier towering over a Japanese puppy<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Van der Oye, “Russo-Japanese War,” 185.

<sup>67</sup> Warner and Warner, *Tide at Sunrise*, 157.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 159, 165–66.

<sup>69</sup> Source: “Giant Russian Soldier and Tiny Japanese Soldier as Dog,” *Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Visualizing Cultures* (website gallery), last accessed 28 February 2016, [http://mit.sustech.edu/OCWExternal/Akamai/21f/21f.027j/yellow\\_promise\\_yellow\\_peril/visnav\\_g.html](http://mit.sustech.edu/OCWExternal/Akamai/21f/21f.027j/yellow_promise_yellow_peril/visnav_g.html).



Figure 4. 1904 Russian propaganda poster, large Russian soldier about to eat a Japanese soldier for breakfast<sup>70</sup>

## 2. Defeat

The Japanese brought all of their resources, military and political, to bear against their larger adversary at its weakest points. The initial surprise attack on Russian naval forces at anchor near Port Arthur inflicted minimal damage, but dealt a major blow to Russian morale and kept the small naval force pinned down. Admiral Makarov, the ablest commander among the Russian forces, was killed when his ship hit a Russian mine that was supposed to have been cleared. The Japanese brought their full force to bear, but the best and brightest among the Russian land forces were tied to the European front, stationed to deter German aggression. The worst blow came when the Baltic Fleet sailed across the world to the Pacific, only to be annihilated by Admiral Togo at the Battle of

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<sup>70</sup> Source: "Giant Russian Soldier Holding Japanese Soldier," *Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Visualizing Cultures* (website gallery), last accessed 28 February 2016, [http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/yellow\\_promise\\_yellow\\_peril/gallery/pages/2002\\_3728.htm](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/yellow_promise_yellow_peril/gallery/pages/2002_3728.htm).

Tsushima. Unable to bring their full military might to bear and unprepared for the skill of their adversary, the Russians faced dismal defeat at the hands of a much smaller enemy.<sup>71</sup>

### **3. Political Fallout, National Humiliation**

The defeat of Russia was a political disaster from which Russia would never completely recover. President Theodore Roosevelt presided over peace negotiations, which were rather generous to Russia—very little land was given to the Japanese, and neither side was compelled to pay indemnities. Nevertheless, the war had placed a significant drain on the Russian economy and morale.<sup>72</sup>

The humiliating defeat robbed the tsar of a large portion of his legitimacy, creating the image of an empire unable to maintain its sovereignty. Toward the end of the conflict, protesting crowds were fired upon by the Russian Army in what became known as the “Bloody Sunday.” Nicholas was forced to compromise with his subjects, creating a legislative body that, while possessing little political power, was free to publicly voice opinions that went against the tsar, and even Russian autocracy.<sup>73</sup>

Combined with the weak economy and the weakened political power of the tsar, the continued strain of World War I resulted in a complete loss of legitimacy, and the ensuing rebellion changed the political landscape of Russia forever. The return of Vladimir Lenin was perfectly-timed—he emerged on the political scene just as the Tsarist state had reached its breaking point.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

The Tsarist narrative (and Tsarism itself) was not an overnight invention. It was neither wholly manufactured nor entirely incidental, but rather the result of long-term central rule in a state with a stunted sense of national identity, in which the Russian people found solidarity in the church and the tsar alone. Following the emasculation of the church by Peter I, Tsarist Russia was primarily defined by the tsar—everything else,

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<sup>71</sup> Van der Oye, “Russo-Japanese War,” 183–90; 197–99.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 197–99.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

from Pan-Slavism to military might, from religion to Russification, was and had to be shown through the state's sacral head, who served as the fulcrum and the lever for the Russian Empire.

### **III. THE STALINIST RUSSIAN NARRATIVE**

The October Revolution of 1917 was a pivotal moment in history—the Russian people, whom Danilevskii had argued would never revolt against their state, had done precisely that, permitting the Soviets under Lenin to seize complete power over the former Empire. Lenin tried to steer the Soviet Union into a position to trigger a global Communist revolution; however, Stalin's priorities were quite different. Stalin's primary interest was the securing and consolidation of power, and he was not afraid to overturn and even reverse many of Lenin's changes.

#### **A. THE STALINIST REVERSAL**

Lenin's revolution began in earnest in 1917. His devotion to Communist ideals saw the deconstruction of many aspects of the Russian Narrative, extending beyond the demise of the Romanov dynasty. The Russian Orthodox Church, a mainstay of the people since 988, was attacked, pilfered, discredited, and banished. The ideas of Great Russia and Russianness were exchanged for the Great Soviet Union and Soviet comradeship. In keeping with anti-Tsarism, Lenin did not foster his own cult of personality.

Stalin pulled back or reversed nearly all of these changes. The reasons varied. His cult of personality, and even Lenin's, was a tool to assure near-absolute legitimacy and power during his life. In the face of the existential threat presented by the Third Reich, Stalin called upon Russia as the backbone of the Soviet Union, using the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian military history, and propaganda aimed primarily at Russians to help bolster his forces against the existential threat presented by the Third Reich. Ultimately, his revolution from above was used to craft a centralized state in which Stalin was more of an absolute leader than arguably any tsar had ever been.

#### **1. Orthodoxy under the Soviet Union**

Orthodoxy was one of the defining characteristics of the Russian empire and people before the Revolution of 1917, although the tsars maintained strict control over the religious institution as the church was perceived as a potential political rival. Lenin

took great pains to ensure that the church would never threaten his new order, bringing persecution that would last until Stalin realized the potential of Russian Orthodoxy as a nation-building tool under the state.

**a. *Enemies of the People***

The Soviet Union was, to a large extent, defined by its enemies: the bourgeoisie, tsarists, fascists, and capitalists were denounced; but the state was also belligerently atheist. All church lands were nationalized, religious marriage and divorce lacked legal status, and religious education was banned.<sup>74</sup> In March 1922, Lenin sent a letter to the Politburo ordering the seizure of church assets. He cited peasant starvation as justification for the confiscation of a massive sum: “a few hundred million (or perhaps even a few billion) gold rubles.”<sup>75</sup> Orthodox leadership was permitted to operate only after publicly swearing their loyalty to the Soviet regime, under Patriarch Tikhon and, upon his death in 1925, Metropolitan Sergi.<sup>76</sup> There would be no patriarch until 1943, when Nazi Germany threatened to annihilate the Soviet Union, and Stalin decided that he needed to motivate the Russian people by any means possible, including their common faith.<sup>77</sup>

**b. *Nation-Building Tool of the State***

There is nothing coincidental about the oft-criticized ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the KGB, dating back to Stalin’s regime. Soviet persecution of religious entities before World War II was rampant until the threat of defeat by Nazi Germany made Russian nationalism a necessity for motivating the predominantly Russian Red Army. In 1943, Stalin met with leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church to grant them more religious freedom, including the election of a new Patriarch. Stalin also established the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs, chaired by NKVD general Georgi G. Karpov. Metropolitan Sergi was elected the first Patriarch, a likely choice due

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<sup>74</sup> Davis, *Long Walk to Church*, 2.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 3; Vladimir Lenin to Vyacheslav Molotov, 19 March 1922, in *Documents*: 46–48, accessed 13 March 2014, [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rc1/07-1\\_046.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rc1/07-1_046.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Davis, *Long Walk to Church*, 4.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 18–20

to his public support of the Soviet Union and continual efforts to bring separatist Christian movements under heel. Upon the death of Patriarch Sergi, eight months later, Metropolitan Aleksii was elected Patriarch unanimously, with one bishop not present: Archbishop Luka objected to the fact that no alternate candidates were on the ballot.<sup>78</sup>

Stalin established the expectation that Russian Orthodox priests would cooperate fully with the KGB, and membership in the organization often proved quite beneficial to their careers. This system of KGB and church collaboration lasted for the life of the Soviet Union, and its effects can still be observed in the modern church: Patriarch Alexsii II, enthroned in 1990, was originally Aleksii Ridiger, born in Estonia as the multi-ethnic son of an Orthodox Priest.<sup>79</sup> He studied at the Leningrad Seminary, graduating in 1949 and entering the “white clergy” of the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>80</sup> “White clergy” are allowed to marry but do not rise within the hierarchy of the church. Aleksii married and had at least one child.<sup>81</sup> He was recruited by the Estonian KGB in 1958; within six months of his recruitment, he was made an archpriest.<sup>82</sup> In 1961, Aleksii professed celibacy and become a member of the “black clergy.”<sup>83</sup> At thirty-two years old (the earliest age allowed) he was appointed bishop of Tallinn.<sup>84</sup> KGB reports revealed after the fall of the Soviet Union describe Aleksii as a willing collaborator, “candid and sensible but prepared to talk with considerable openness to the KGB and willing to pass

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<sup>78</sup> Davis, *Long Walk to Church*, 18–21.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 80–82; John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 36–37.

<sup>80</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, 36–37.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

on unflattering tales about his fellow clerics,” according to expert and U.S. diplomat Nathaniel Davis.<sup>85</sup>

## **2. The Great Soviet Union**

Lenin’s Soviet Union supplanted the Russian Empire along with all pretensions of Tsarism itself. Service to the Tsar was overturned in favor of the quest to create a global Marxist Utopia by building Communism, while the concept of the Great Russian Empire was replaced with the Great Soviet Union. Stalin did not alter this portion of the Soviet narrative—the legitimacy of the new empire was not entirely based upon military victory or territorial expansion, but carried an emphasis on its progressive nature and the prosperity of the working class. The Third Reich was a natural enemy, but anti-fascist propaganda was suspended during the short peace between Hitler and Stalin. After hostilities broke out, the Great Patriotic War would be the focus of Soviet propaganda long after the war’s end, and the term “fascist” became a popular way to denounce one’s political opponents, a damning accusation even to the present day. The idea that the Soviet Union was great because of its military victories and territorial hegemony represents a partial return to the mindset of Tsarist Russia, in which greatness was a measure of the power and breadth of the empire.

### ***a. Constructing Communism***

From the early thirties until the outbreak of hostilities with Nazi Germany, Stalin’s regime used propaganda to extol the virtues of Soviet advancement and leadership. The message was simple: hard-working Soviets were building themselves a

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<sup>85</sup> Between 1990 and 1992, while the Soviet Union was hurtling toward its demise and the Russian Federation was born, public accusations were voiced concerning the ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the KGB. Oleg Kalugin, ex-KGB general, declared publicly that several higher-ranking members of the church were “on the payroll of the KGB.” As more KGB documentation was made publicly available, clerical collaborators were revealed to the public by the press. Several metropolitans were named, though the patriarch himself was omitted, possibly presenting too high a target for even the investigators. Archbishop Chrysostom of Vilnius, known for his integrity, published explanatory remarks: “I knowingly cooperated with [the KGB]—but in such a way that I undeviatingly tried to maintain the position of my Church...I was never a stool pigeon, nor an informer.” The archbishop made a telling statement: in order to be able to serve their flock in the Soviet Union, clergymen had to at least maintain the appearance of complete cooperation with the KGB. To have presented an image to the contrary would have been grounds for removal, and likely imprisonment or death. Davis, *Long Walk to Church*, 81, 95–97.



better life (and Communism) under strong leadership. The general themes included universal literacy, economic prosperity, martial might, technological innovation, and industrial ascendancy (propaganda specifically concerning Stalin and Lenin is discussed later in the chapter, under Cult of Personality). Broad adult literacy was one of the major accomplishments of the Soviet Union, shown in multiple publications (including Figure 5).



Figure 5. This Boris Kudoyarov photograph shows Uzbek women learning to read, under the pensive eye of Lenin.<sup>86</sup>

*USSR in Construction* was a propaganda journal published from 1930 until 1941, returning briefly in 1949 for the celebration of Stalin's seventieth birthday. It displayed not only elements of socialist realism, but also all of the major themes of the Soviet narrative. The covers of *USSR in Construction* show the scientific advancements, industrial might, and the prosperous people of the Soviet Union to the world (see Figures 6 and 7).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Source: David King, *Red Star over Russia* (New York: Tate Publishing, 2009), 247.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.



Figure 6. Covers of *USSR in Construction* from 1935 (no. 1, “The Maxim Gorky Agitational Propaganda Squadron”) and 1934 (no. 6, “Soviet Science”); the third image is a 1931 poster advertising the journal.<sup>88</sup>



Figure 7. Covers of *USSR in Construction* in 1940 (no. 1, “The Ferghana Canal,” and no. 6, “Soviet Childhood”)<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Source: King, *Red Star over Russia*, 222–223.

<sup>89</sup> Source: King, *Red Star over Russia*, 222.

*b. Shifting Alliances before the Storm*

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Stalin correctly assessed that Germany was the greatest threat to Russia and believed, not without cause, that Britain and France were attempting to maneuver Adolf Hitler and Stalin into war with one another.<sup>90</sup> Thinking that the impending conflict would be similar in nature to the First World War, Stalin was determined to avoid hostilities as long as possible while building up a strong militarized force.<sup>91</sup> There was also an element of expansionism: Stalin wished to extend Soviet control to territories in the Baltic states, Bessarabia, Finland, and Poland.<sup>92</sup> Hitler hoped to invade Poland without Russian opposition and then to wage war on Britain and France without any eastern threat.<sup>93</sup> The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact established non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (depicted in Figure 8) while secretly providing for the division of other territories between them.<sup>94</sup>



Figure 8. Left, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as Stalin watches on; right, *USSR in Construction*'s depiction of a Belorussian male gratefully embracing a Red Army soldier as Russia invades and annexes Poland.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Touchstone, 1990), 477.

<sup>91</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 280–81.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>93</sup> Shirer, *Rise and Fall*, 516.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 540–541.

<sup>95</sup> King, *Red Star over Russia*, 286–87.

The Soviet Union had been producing anti-German propaganda prior to the agreement. The Sergei Eisenstein film *Alexander Nevsky*, first released in 1938, focuses on the eponymous prince's defense of Novgorod against the Teutonic Knights (portrayed as Germanic papists, as shown in Figure 9) at the Battle of Lake Peipus, also known as the Battle on the Ice.<sup>96</sup> The diametric shifts in foreign policy created significant changes in Soviet propaganda. For the duration of the pact, the anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist campaigns were suspended, including such works as the 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky* and the anti-fascist film *Professor Mamlock*.<sup>97</sup> The term “fascist” disappeared from the Soviet vocabulary for approximately twenty-two months.<sup>98</sup> The two empires acted as partners until 22 June 1941, at which point their cooperation was ended with the advance of Wehrmacht tank treads.<sup>99</sup>



Figure 9. In *Alexander Nevsky*, papist German knights invade ancient Russia. The clergy is shown as a craven despot traveling in opulence; Teutonic headgear bears a blatant resemblance to Wehrmacht helmets.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Alexander Nevsky*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein and D.I. Vassiliev (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 1982), DVD; Anthony Read and David Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace: Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939–1941* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 292–93.

<sup>97</sup> Rob Edelman, “Alexander Nevsky: Eisenstein’s Symphonic Vision,” in *Alexander Nevsky*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein and D.I. Vassiliev (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 1982), DVD.

<sup>98</sup> Read and Fisher, *Deadly Embrace*, 292.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>100</sup> Source: *Alexander Nevsky*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein and D.I. Vassiliev (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 1982), DVD.

c. *The Fascist Storm Breaks*

Despite receiving warnings of the imminent blitzkrieg, the Soviet Union was stunned by the vicious Wehrmacht onslaught on the morning of 22 June—none more so than Stalin, who was so traumatized by the betrayal that he could neither take action nor assume effective command for two weeks.<sup>101</sup> It was Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov who made the first speech concerning the sudden German aggression (and restoring “fascist” to the official Soviet vernacular):

This morning, at four o'clock... without a declaration of war, German troops attacked our country... The entire responsibility for this predatory onslaught on the Soviet Union falls clearly and unequivocally on the German fascist rulers! The government appeals to all of you, men and women, citizens of the Soviet Union, to rally as never before around our glorious Bolshevik Party, around the Soviet government, around our great leader, Comrade Stalin.<sup>102</sup>

Caught off-guard, unable to return fire, incapable of attack or defense, and deprived of the centralized command upon which the Red Army now completely relied, the Soviet Western front crumbled before the massive German assault.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, in accordance with the hastily-developed war plans of 1940, Red Army defenses had been concentrated in the southwest, positioned to prevent a German offensive from reaching the supply-rich Kiev and Ukraine.<sup>104</sup> This prediction of German planning was erroneous—the heavily-mechanized Wehrmacht thrust to the northwest was aimed at decapitating the Soviet regime by taking Leningrad and Moscow, in addition to the Ukraine.<sup>105</sup> Stalin’s frantic orders in the initial phase of the war were unrealistic to the point of being detrimental: “destruction of the enemy in the shortest possible time and no surrender of territory,” according to historian John Erickson.<sup>106</sup> He also re-instituted

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<sup>101</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 283.

<sup>102</sup> Read and Fisher, *Deadly Embrace*, 641–42.

<sup>103</sup> John Erickson, “The Great Patriotic War,” in *The Military History of the Soviet Union*, ed. Robin Higham and Frederick W. Kagan (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 114–115.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 111, 115.

<sup>105</sup> Erickson, “Great Patriotic War,” 115.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.



political officers throughout the Red Army, further reducing the efficiency of its inexperienced officer corps.<sup>107</sup>

By the end of 1941, the Germans had advanced eastward by two hundred miles, taken three million Red Army prisoners, destroyed 18,000 Soviet tanks and 20,000 Soviet aircraft, besieged Leningrad, and conquered Kiev and the Ukraine.<sup>108</sup> By 3 October, Hitler publicly announced victory to the German people: “I declare...without any reservation that the enemy in the East has been struck down and will never rise again.”<sup>109</sup> This proved to be premature, as the Wehrmacht had ultimately failed to take Leningrad or Moscow, and the Red Army was not yet completely vanquished.

**d.      *The Great Patriotic War***

The start of the war proved disastrous for the Soviet Union, and Stalin found it necessary to make several adjustments, reversals even, of policy. An emphasis on Russian nationalism replaced the Socialist rhetoric used to inspire Red Army forces, even going so far as to name the conflict “The Great Patriotic War.” Stalin reinstated the Russian Orthodox Church, even allowing a new Patriarch to be elected. The infamous Order 227 was signed, forbidding any Soviet retreat or surrender on pain of death, regardless of the circumstances. Commissar control was relaxed, and Stalin began to take the advice offered by his generals, unlike his Nazi rival.<sup>110</sup>

Stalin’s greatest shift in terms of propaganda was neither an appeal to Russianness nor to the Russian Orthodox Church, but to historical military triumphs of the Russian Empire. While the two-year hiatus greatly reduced its effectiveness, the film *Alexander Nevsky* was a successful propaganda film that recalled one of the greatest victories of ancient Rus. Stalin also evoked the War of 1812, comparing Hitler to Napoleon Bonaparte and even borrowing the older war’s popular title of the “Great Patriotic

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 115–116.

<sup>109</sup> Shirer, *Rise and Fall*, 854.

<sup>110</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 288.

War.”<sup>111</sup> The cinematic display of great Russian leadership continued even after the war’s end with *Ivan the Terrible*. The Eisenstein films about Ivan the Terrible were commissioned by Stalin, who saw parallels between the necessary cruelties carried out by Stalin and the tsar.<sup>112</sup>

Following the Fall of Berlin, the Great Patriotic War became the most celebrated victory in the history of the Soviet Union (and remains so today, in Russia). Parades marked the victory over Hitler for decades, not only in the Soviet Union but throughout the entire Warsaw Pact. Stalin-era films such as *The Fall of Berlin* and *The Battle of Stalingrad* portrayed the stalwart Soviet defenders, predominantly Russian forces, guided through difficult fighting by the masterful hand of Stalin.

*e. Post-War: The Birth of Anti-Americanism*

Toward the end of the war, Allied leadership divided Europe among the three allies. Germany was split, with Berlin divided into four sections (under Soviet, American, British, and French influence). Territorial lines of influence were drawn between the Eastern and Western worlds, setting up the borders for the long Cold War.

Up until 1939, Soviet propaganda was generally positive toward the United States, saving its anger for Germany, Britain, France, and Poland. Eight years later, with the United States emerging as the Soviet Union’s primary rival, propaganda began to paint the Western superpower as a prime capitalist foe. Stalin even referred to U.S. president Harry S. Truman as, “the clerk of American imperialism.”<sup>113</sup> From then until the 1980s, anti-American propaganda continued to demonize the United States in Soviet propaganda.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Stalin’s reliance upon Russian military history was even portrayed in later Soviet films about World War II. In the 1949 movie *The Battle for Stalingrad*, Stalin consults an unnamed friend from his past, and reads a portion of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* to his friend; in doing so, he directly compares Napoleon to Hitler. As this film was undoubtedly screened and approved by Stalin before its release to the public, it can be viewed as official Stalinist narrative; Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 288; *The Battle of Stalingrad*, directed by Vladimir Petrov (Chicago: International Historic Films, 2008), DVD.

<sup>112</sup> Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 179.

<sup>113</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Puzzle of Russian Anti-Americanism: From ‘Below’ or From ‘Above,’” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63:5 (2010), 880.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.



Figure 10. A 1952 Yulii Ganf cartoon in *Krokodil* magazine, “New Techniques from Wall Street,” in which an American soldier is launching “plague, typhus, and cholera,” while the U.S. Secretary of State (Dean Acheson), and the Secretary-General of the UN (Trygve Lie) sing, “the USA does not have biological weaponry.”<sup>115</sup>

### 3. Russian Nationalism: “Rise Up In Arms, O Russian Folk!”<sup>116</sup>

As the Wehrmacht tore its way across the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa, morale flagged in the Red Army. Stalin correctly assessed that an appeal to Russian nationalism would help bolster the fight against the Third Reich, as Russians made up the majority not only the Soviet armed forces, but also the portions of the population offering the greatest resistance to the invaders. This pro-Russian trend in Stalinist propaganda

<sup>115</sup> Source: King, *Red Star over Russia*, 336–337.

<sup>116</sup> “Arise, Ye Russian People,” *Alexander Nevsky*.



would last beyond the end of the war, and could be heard in speeches and seen in visual propaganda.

*a. Russian Nationalism above All Others*

Stalin was not himself a Russian, but a Georgian by birth. His accent clearly marked him as a non-Russian, but on multiple occasions he placed Russians above all other ethnicities of the Soviet Union, both privately and publicly. Much of this favoritism was intended to help in the fight against Germany; at one point Stalin remarked how “the population won’t fight for us Communists, but they will fight for Mother Russia.”<sup>117</sup> Milovan Djilas, then the vice-president of Yugoslavia, met Stalin in 1944 and later recorded his impressions:

I was surprised at his accent. One could tell that he was not a Russian. Nevertheless his Russian vocabulary was rich... and replete with Russian proverbs and sayings... The conversation began by Stalin asking us about our impressions of the Soviet Union. I replied: “We are enthusiastic!”—to which he rejoined: “And we are not enthusiastic, though we are doing all we can to make things better in Russia.” It is engraved in my memory that Stalin used the term *Russia*, and not Soviet Union, which meant that he was not only inspiring Russian nationalism but was himself inspired by it and identified himself with it.<sup>118</sup>

The focus on Russian nationalism continued throughout the war. At a toast to Red Army commanders in 1945, Stalin extolled the virtues of the Russian people above the rest of the Soviet Union:

I should like to propose a toast to the health of our Soviet people, and in the first place, the Russian people. I drink in the first place to the health of the Russian people because it is the most outstanding nation of all the nations forming the Soviet Union... A different people could have said to the Government: “You have failed to justify our expectations. Go away. We shall install another government which will conclude peace with Germany and assure us a quiet life.” The Russian people, however, did not take this path because it trusted the correctness of the policy of its Government, and it made sacrifices to ensure the rout of Germany. This confidence of the Russian people in the Soviet Government proved to be

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<sup>117</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 288.

<sup>118</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1990), 61–62.

that decisive force which ensured the historic victory over the enemy of humanity—over fascism.<sup>119</sup>

**b. Russian-Themed War Propaganda**

Prior to the war, Stalin's cult of personality went to great lengths to establish him as the father of all Soviet peoples, picturing him with ethnic minorities as often as possible (see Figure 11). In the Great Patriotic War (and post-war depictions), however, ethnic minorities and even Stalin himself took a backseat to Russians. The shift may not have been entirely deliberate, but it is difficult finding ethnic minorities in wartime Soviet propaganda. The Russo-centric propaganda represented yet another return to the Tsarist narrative.<sup>120</sup>



Figure 11. Pictures of Stalin shown with children in *Pravda*, in keeping with the ethnic shift in focus; with a Buriat Mongol girl in 1936, and with a blond Russian boy in 1946.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Joseph Stalin, "Toast to the Russian People at a Reception in Honour of Red Army Commanders Given by the Soviet Government in the Kremlin on Thursday, May 24, 1945," *Joseph Stalin Internet Archive*, last accessed 15 February, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1945/05/24.htm>.

<sup>120</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 46–47.

<sup>121</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 45.



Figure 12. Soviet war posters: “Red Army Warriors, Save Us!” by Viktor Koretsky, and “Fascism—The Most Evil Enemy of Women. Everyone to the Struggle Against Fascism!” by Nina Vatolina (who used her Slavic neighbor as the model).<sup>122</sup>

#### 4. Cult of Personality

Of all Russian and Soviet leaders, Stalin is the epitome of a modern cult of personality. Tsar Nicholas II’s first steps toward building a modern cult of personality had ended in utter ruin, and Lenin saw no reason to establish his own. While Lenin’s image was certainly not unknown to the Soviet peoples, there is no evidence of a state-wide attempt to create such a following for Lenin, either in mass media or through the use of cult products. It was only after Lenin’s death that his own cult emerged, and Stalin’s cult was quick to follow.

##### a. *The Posthumous Cult of Lenin*

Lenin’s cult was somewhat unusual in that it was posthumous, and it began in earnest with Lenin’s own corpse. There was a large public interest in viewing the body,

<sup>122</sup> Source: King, *Red Star over Russia*, 295, 300.

and Felix Dzerzhinsky led a project to preserve the body in order to accommodate the people. The preservation and display of Lenin was a controversial subject, even within the party. Kliment Voroshilov and Nadezdha Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, were opposed to the idea, wishing to avoid association with the grand burials of the tsars. Eventually those in favor of permanently preserving the body fabricated vast public support for the idea, and Lenin's body remains preserved to this day.<sup>123</sup>

Lenin's body was only the beginning. A "death mask" of Lenin, produced by sculptor Sergei Merkurov, was used as the basis for fifty-five sculpted works of art, two of which were then selected for mass production. Photographs, film, portraits, poetry, prose, and other forms of media commemorated the late leader. Places were named for Lenin. Testimonials and anecdotes were printed to present the leader in the desired light. In one such testimonial, Lenin comes to visit the Obukhov Factory to speak to the workers. The story maligns the Mensheviks as "bourgeois lickspittles who grew fat on the [Great] War," and who attempt (unsuccessfully) to prevent Lenin from speaking. Of course, Lenin's speech was successful and moving, and the workers were so touched that they lifted Lenin on their shoulders to bring him to his car. The posthumous cult of Lenin served as a model for the cult of Stalin.<sup>124</sup>

***b. The Appearance of Stalin***

The cult of Stalin had a false start in 1929, with the celebration of the leader's 50th birthday. *Pravda*, the most prominent and widely read organ of the party narrative, began by publishing telegrams congratulating Stalin on his birthday. On his actual birthday of 21 December, the eight-page journal was packed with articles praising the leader. There were multiple depictions of Stalin, including a front-page photograph that differed from later depictions in a number of ways. Stalin's hair is parted to one side. His gaze is fixed on the camera, and there are visible wrinkles under his eyes. His moustache

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<sup>123</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 22.

<sup>124</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 22–24.

is noticeably thinner when compared with later photographs and portraits (see Figure 13).<sup>125</sup>



Figure 13. Stalin in *Pravda* on the celebration of his 50th birthday, 1929.<sup>126</sup>

December 1929 was the last celebration of Stalinism for nearly three years. From 1930 to 1933, depictions of Stalin seemed to vanish almost entirely—this may have been an effort to distance the leader from the chaos and strife associated with collectivization, according to historian Jan Plamper:

Between 1930 and mid-1933, Stalin made only rare appearances on the pages of *Pravda*. When he did, he was shown together with other Party functionaries and was not marked as outstanding or seen on socialist holiday occasions. This hiatus has been attributed to either a deliberate attempt to avoid linking the person of Stalin with the upheavals of collectivization, or to vestiges of opposition to his single power in the Party.<sup>127</sup>

In 1933, the cult of Stalin emerged full-force. Stalin's personality cult was a modern one in every sense: he was presented as the secular patriarch of the entire population of the Soviet Union, though mass media within a closed society. It has been

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>127</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 36–37.

argued that Russian peasants had always been able to venerate the sacral tsar as a father-figure, with the primary difference being that Stalin was the head of an atheist state. It is relatively clear, however, that the cult of Stalin came not from the people, but from the Party. Stalin's visage was produced on a massive scale, to the point where it was difficult to avoid the facsimile of his presence. His appearances in mass media were carefully vetted and approved—there still exists a massive paper trail showing Stalin personally judging whether or not various articles of propaganda should be published.<sup>128</sup>

*c. Secular Sovereignty*

Stalin was set apart as the sole secular leader, with unshakeable legitimacy derived from popular sovereignty (and succession from Lenin). He was often pictured with Lenin, but in modern portraits great care was taken to distinguish him from others. When dressed formally or in uniform, Stalin's uniform was often a different color from the rest (see Figures 14 and 15). While others looked at Stalin or one another, Stalin's gaze was calmly fixed on a point beyond the camera, portraying him as a leader with his eye on the future of the Soviet Union. The cult of Stalin was carefully framed to avoid the appearance of self-aggrandizement—the leader could never be seen to glorify himself, so a certain amount of humility was necessary (at least during public appearances). Most anecdotes of personal meetings with Stalin describe him as a thoughtful, humble individual who never raised his voice. Praise for Stalin always came from around the leader, never from the lips of the leader himself.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 34–35; Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 131–32.

<sup>129</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 120–126.





Figure 14. A 1934 photograph from *Pravda*, in which Stalin's uniform color and picture placement set him clearly apart.<sup>130</sup>



Figure 15. "Glory to the Great Stalin!" A 1950 portrait by Iury Kugach, Vasily Nechitailo, and Viktor Tsyplakov.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 39.

<sup>131</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, color plate 4.

*d. Masculinity*

Stalin's moustache and stout physique were a large part of his public persona and masculinity, a constant in all cult products and mass media portraying the leader. The placement order within art was also telling. In Russian art, the left symbolized the female and the beginning of something, while the right was maleness and the end. Lenin is almost universally shown to the left, while Stalin is shown to the right. In some artwork, Marx and Engels were placed to the left of Lenin, while Stalin would always appear on the far right. Whether Lenin was the originator or the second-to-last "mother" of Communism, Stalin was always the final leader and father, deriving absolute authority through a legitimate succession, and placed to the far right (see Figures 16 and 17 examples).<sup>132</sup>



Figure 16. *Pravda* depicting the left-to-right progression from Marx to Stalin.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>133</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 42.





Figure 17. A 1933 poster by Gustav Klutsis commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of Marx: “Under the Banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin.” This banner also displays the left-to-right progression from Marx to Stalin.<sup>134</sup>

*e. Universality*

He often shared his portraits with non-Russians, as the great paternal figure to all ethnic minorities as well as Russians, appealing to the entire population. The ethnicities of the people around him varied, mostly by regional focus, and always either alone or at the center of praise (see Figure 18). Even Stalin’s own image changed to appeal more to a target demographic, whether through his wardrobe or by a regional artist’s ethnic reinterpretation (see Figure 19).<sup>135</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Source: King, *Red Star over Russia*, 240.

<sup>135</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 46–47.



Figure 18. Stalin receives flowers on his 60th birthday—the ethnic diversity of his adoring populace is on full display in this issue of *Pravda*, 22 December 1939.<sup>136</sup>

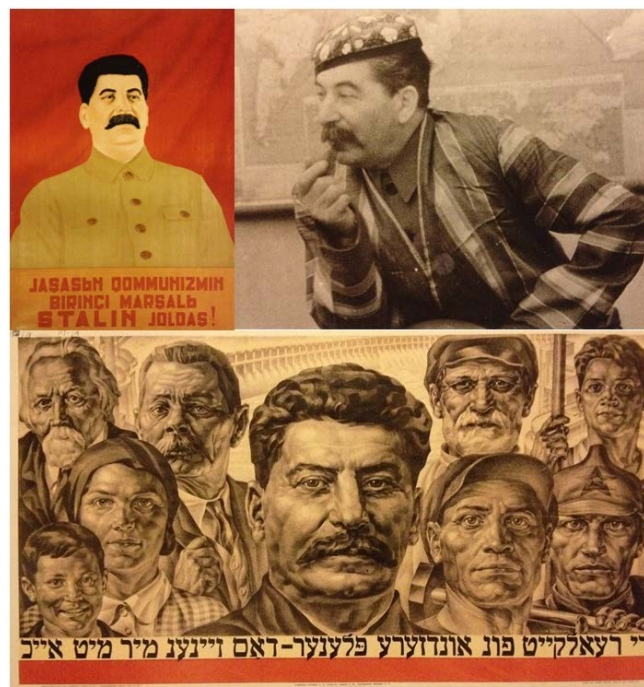


Figure 19. Top left, an Azerbaijan poster of Stalin, with the words “Long Live Stalin, the First Marshall of Communism!” Top right, Stalin smoking his characteristic pipe at a Central Asian Peoples conference. Bottom, Stalin is centrally displayed with Maxim Gorky to the left, and Yiddish writing in Hebrew script: “We are the Realization of the Plan.”<sup>137</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 49.

<sup>137</sup> Source: King, *Red Star over Russia*, 240, 247, 284.

*f. Media and Cult Products*

Stalin was the subject of continual praise by the Party, receiving accolades from various forms of mass media from 1933 until after his death in 1953. His image appeared in photographs, paintings (in the socialist-realist style), and sculptures. The leader also began to appear in films, portrayed by a select set of actors—initially, his movie stand-in was Mikhail Gelovani, a Georgian actor with a noticeable accent who played Stalin in more than twenty films, eventually receiving the Stalin Prize.<sup>138</sup> Other actors with the role of Stalin in that time period include A. Kobaladze, Aleksei Dikii, and Semen Gol'shtab (a Jewish actor).<sup>139</sup> Of course, the character of Stalin is shown as a stoic character with astounding insight into the enemies of the Soviet Union, and adoring followers who marvel at his ingenuity (and humility). He is also portrayed as being down-to-earth—in his first scene in *The Fall of Berlin*, Stalin is shown serenely wandering a garden before greeting an acclaimed worker in a warm and familiar fashion (see Figure 20).<sup>140</sup> Even Stalin's name became a cult product: Soviet workers were told to work *po-stalinski* (Stalin-like), and his name appeared in formations of airplanes, athletes, and workers.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 47; Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 212.

<sup>139</sup> Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 212.

<sup>140</sup> *The Fall of Berlin*, directed by Mikhail Chiaureli (Chicago: International Historic Films, 2006), DVD.

<sup>141</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 37.



Figure 20. Left, Stalin (portrayed by Mikhail Gelovani) greets a factory worker in a garden in *The Fall of Berlin*; right, the Fedor Shurpin portrait *Morning of Our Fatherland* bears a similar motif, with Stalin standing in a fertile field.<sup>142</sup>

### *g. Closed Society*

The Soviet Union's borders were closed to all without special permission. John Scott, an American writer who spent five years working as a welder in the Magnitogorsk, was unable to even bring his Russian wife abroad—the authorities refused to give her a passport due to her Soviet citizenship.<sup>143</sup> In addition to its closed external borders, the Soviet Union restricted internal travel. As early as December 1932, the Soviet Union instituted internal passport regulations to prevent hungry peasants in collective farmlands from migrating to the city.<sup>144</sup> This regulation also served to keep undesirables out of the cities—internal passports were restricted to urban workers and wage-earners, while peasants, criminals, kulaks (see the case study on Collectivization), and the unemployed were driven out of the city.<sup>145</sup>

## **5. Censorship**

Censorship in Russia reached its peak during Stalin's reign, with new and old tools being used to completely control the Soviet narrative. Orders were secretly issued,

<sup>142</sup> Source: *Fall of Berlin*; Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, color plate 8.

<sup>143</sup> John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 225.

<sup>144</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance & Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 92–95.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

or merely implied, maintaining an air of mystery about the official stance of the state. The regime was so intimately involved with the creation of its narrative that alternates were aborted before they began, and dissenters were swiftly silenced. There was little that escaped Russia by way of a divergent viewpoint.

*a. Deliberate Obfuscation*

Stalin's regime deliberately cultivated an air of mystery, sending ambiguous and unclear messages that could easily be misinterpreted. This obfuscation allowed the regime to benefit from low-level compliance to the most prevalent interpretation of the will of the regime, while permitting the state to repudiate the actions of overzealous officials at the state's convenience. In theory, Soviet law and practice in the 1920s tolerated religious organizations, permitting church officials to operate more-or-less unmolested. In the 1930s, Stalin's regime quietly (and unofficially) approved of brutal tactics to drive out religion, closing churches and arresting priests under secret directives. Because these instructions were never officially published, the government was later able to deny culpability in the prosecution of the religious. A similar practice could be seen in collectivization, when Stalin gently rebuked agents for overly enthusiastic actions (see case study).<sup>146</sup>

*b. Aborting Alternate Narratives*

Ideas that conflicted with the party line were not allowed to exist. Art would be routed for approval through one of two Soviet institutions: Glavrepertkom for performing arts and Glavlit for text, portraits, and sculpted work. Following institutional approval, art was forwarded to Stalin's secretariat to be approved for production and circulation (two separate approval processes, one for production and one for circulation). Stalin's secretary could reject, approve, or recommend changes to the work. Stalin did not often bother with written comments for visual art, sticking primarily to text products (especially screenplays; see Figure 21).<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26–28.

<sup>147</sup> Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 130–133.



Stalin's obsessive interest in the cinema went beyond traditional censorship. Not only was the state apparatus heavily involved in virtually every step of the process, but Stalin would often personally take a role in the creative process, making edits and suggesting content. Stalin did not seem to think much of a director's role in filmmaking, and he disliked unorthodox or complex camera work, preferring a camera to stay more or less at eye-level during filming. While this stifled the creativity of Soviet directors to an extent, it also kept the position safe, especially when compared to the numerous screenwriters and officials that were condemned to the Gulag for propagating unapproved narratives.<sup>148</sup>

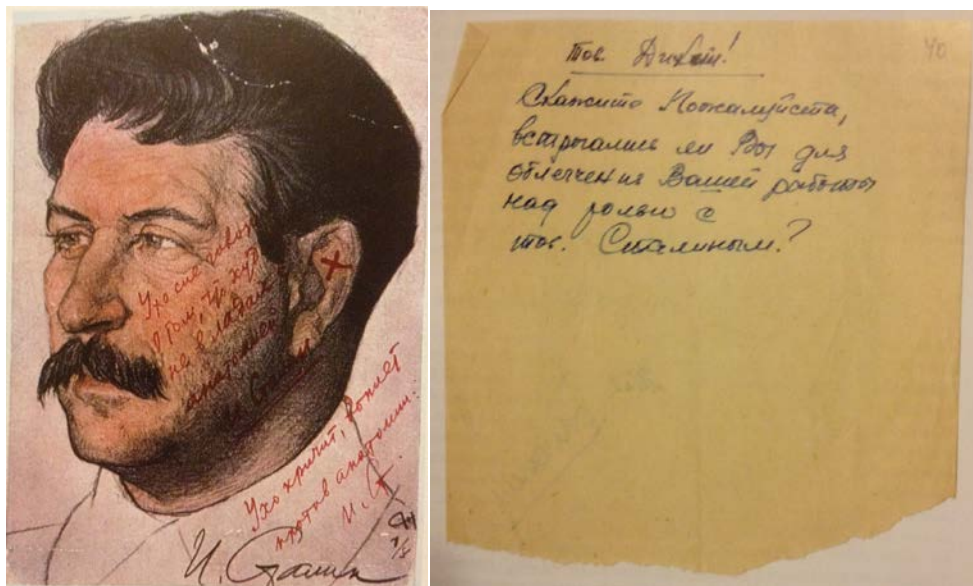


Figure 21. Left, a portrait of Stalin, with a note from the leader himself: “This ear screams that the artist doesn’t know anatomy. J. Stalin. The ear screams, is a gross offense against anatomy. J. Stalin.” Right, an anonymous note on scrap paper handed to Alexei Diky, one of the few actors used to portray Stalin in Soviet cinema: “Please tell us, have you met with comrade Stalin to prepare for your role?”<sup>149</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), 131–33.

<sup>149</sup> Source: Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, color plate 9, color plate 20.

*c. Suppression*

Stalin's regime perpetrated purges of its leadership and military personnel on a recurring basis; political rivals and outliers were often accused of spying and subversion, regardless of their actual actions. Nevertheless, those that actually propagated alternative narratives were quickly neutralized. The Soviet Union employed mock trials and tribunals to establish guilt, quickly and efficiently sending the accused to a forced labor camp or a shooting squad. After the accused was inevitably found guilty (and was either imprisoned or executed), their image might disappear entirely from the public domain, as happened to Nikolai Yezhov, former head of the NKVD (see Figure 22).<sup>150</sup>



Figure 22. Left, original photograph with Stalin and Yezhov; right, Yezhov is airbrushed into non-existence.<sup>151</sup>

**B. CASE STUDY: COLLECTIVIZATION UNDER STALIN**

Stalin's first Five-Year Plan displayed the narrative and censorship of Stalin's early regime: militant atheism and a dogged pursuit of Communist ideals, redistributing and controlling all agriculture. Its goal was to help modernize the Soviet state, which was lagging behind Europe in agriculture, industrialization, and education. The goals were simple: to establish state control of all three areas, to shift the focus of labor from agriculture to industry, and to create a broad literacy program that would also help bring the state closer to its rivals. Eventually, Stalin's regime would claim victory on all three

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<sup>150</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 253–57.

<sup>151</sup> Source: David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 163.

fronts; collectivization, however, would come at a staggering price in terms of human life—a price that was concealed so effectively that even today the death toll estimates vary widely.<sup>152</sup>

### 1. The Kulak and the Priest: Liquidating Class Enemies

Collectivization was a vast step in building Communism in the Soviet Union, and it began with the destruction of the “kulak” as a class. Lenin divided a farming village into three classes: the lower-class *bedniaki*, the middle-class (bourgeois) *seredniaki*, and the upper-class *kulak* (a term derived from the Russian word for “fist”). In theory, kulaks were wealthy farmers, guilty of not sharing their wealth with the other, less fortunate farmers. In reality, the kulak was normally just a single rung above the other farmers, a marginally-successful farmer whose possession of a handful of farm animals and ability to hire seasonal workers set him apart from his fellow farmers. Lenin set the kulak apart as a class enemy (see Figure 23).<sup>153</sup>

During Stalin’s collectivization, the term kulak was broadened to include all opposition, readily applied to any farmer with little difficulty. Soviet tribunals designated kulaks as they saw fit, with broad freedom to apply the brand to anyone that seemed marginally well-off or that opposed collectivization; the kulaks were then deported to the Gulag, with their lands and livestock redistributed among the kolkhoz, or collective farm. In her book *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance & Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization*, Sheila Fitzgerald elaborates on the fickle power of the Soviets:

Sometimes the names added were chosen arbitrarily, on the basis of personal spite or excessive concern about social origin. Many rural teachers were added to lists without... due cause. There was a report from the Urals that activists in a rural factory settlement had dekulakized an old man who had been a village policemen [sic] in Tsarist times, despite the fact that he had “no land, no horse, [and] no cow.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Malin, *Soviet Tragedy*, 195.

<sup>153</sup> Malin, *Soviet Tragedy*, 126.

<sup>154</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 55.





Figure 23. Left, a 1930 poster, “Bash the Kulak off the Kolkhoz.” Right, a worker demonstration on a collective farm, carrying a banner that reads, “Liquidate the Kulaks as a Class.”<sup>155</sup>

Stalin took advantage of the collectivization to rid himself of another class enemy, the village priest. As Soviets were carrying out the work of redistributing farm assets to the kolkhozes, the village churches were being shut down, with the priest removed. The belligerent atheism initially began by Lenin continued to be implemented under Stalin, up until he called upon their assistance in the Great Patriotic War. Historian Martin Malia describes the first part of collectivization:

Before the collectivization drive most kolkhozes were TOZs. Once the drive began, Party activists aimed for the artel, and even beyond it for the commune, collectivizing cows, pigs, chickens, the peasants’ garden plots, and even household implements. At the same time, the village church was closed, its bell taken down, and the priest chased off. The immemorial way of life of peasant Russia was shattered with one blow. Needless to say, this operation was no longer a Plan. “Plan,” along with “liquidation of the kulak,” was now only a battle cry in the Party’s storming of the traditional Russian village.<sup>156</sup>

The initial push went too far, too quickly. The regime had stolen away their salvation, and now threatened their possessions in the mortal realm. Livestock was the most precious asset that a peasant farmer might possess, and farmers began defending

<sup>155</sup> Source: King, *Red Star over Russia*, 218.

<sup>156</sup> Malin, *Soviet Tragedy*, 197; TOZs, artels, and communes were different types of kolkhozes—in a TOZ, only tools were shared; in an artel, land was shared; and in a commune, everything was pooled and shared by the community.

their livestock from confiscation in the only way they knew: slaughter. During the initial push, an estimated four million horses and fourteen million heads of cattle were butchered before they could be taken. Exaggerated reports were released that over half of Russian agriculture had been collectivized, but half of the new kolkhozes existed only on paper. Rapid collectivization was driving the Soviet Union toward agricultural calamity.<sup>157</sup>

There was also cause for alarm on the Soviet Union's Western border. Rather than stabilize the border with Poland, the policy destabilized it; the forced transition to collective farming motivated droves of Ukrainians to abandon their homes and migrate west. Stalin was concerned that Poland and Japan might align against the Soviet Union, with the Japanese Empire backing a Polish invasion. These fears were based on a very real threat: communication between the two powers had been discovered by Soviet agents.<sup>158</sup>

## 2. "Dizzy With Success"

Stalin saw the destabilization of Ukraine with great concern, and called for a temporary halt to the Five-Year Plan, in an article entitled, "Dizzy With Success." He claimed that collectivization had been a rousing success, and even admitted that some agents might have been overly zealous with regards to their mission. The collectivization achieved in Soviet Ukraine was reversed, for the most part, and the peasant farmers believed that somehow they had won. They would soon discover that this belief was wrong.<sup>159</sup>

Stalin began collectivization anew, but this time he worked in a slower and more insidious manner. He began by raising taxes on the independent farmer, economically coercing them to join collectives. He granted considerable authority to the farmers in the collectives over the independent hold-outs, giving them the power to confiscate seed

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<sup>157</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 196–97.

<sup>158</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 30–32.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

grain. Deportations continued, and peasants had a simple choice: starvation at home or incarceration in the Gulag. This time, farmer resistance crumbled before the onslaught of the Soviet system, and by the end of 1931 approximately seventy percent of the Soviet Ukraine's farm land was collectivized.<sup>160</sup>

In order to faster meet the goals of the Five-Year Plan, officials were ordered to confiscate all food until the high harvest quotas were met—including the precious seed grain. A poor harvest of 1932 resulted in mass starvation, but the Soviet policy was intractable. Orders were issued to prevent the peasants from relocating, and city borders were closed to prevent begging. The regime passed a law in the same year, making the possession of any food into evidence of withholding food, a punishable crime. Stalin interpreted even the starvation of the peasantry as an act of rebellion.<sup>161</sup>

### **3. Internal Censorship**

Stalin's regime did its best to curtail knowledge of the famine, primarily through controlling the movement of peasants. Border guards were increased to prevent peasants from leaving their kolkhozes. The state blamed Ukrainian and Polish nationalists for the famine in Ukraine, and the Ukrainian security chief, Vsevolod Balytskyi, oversaw the deportation of thousands of so-called Ukrainian and Polish conspirators, accusing them of sabotaging the grain supply to incite rebellion. City residents were required to carry internal passports, so that farmers could not come to beg. Stalin even denied long-distance tickets to the peasantry, essentially giving them a death sentence in a land now bereft of food, save the crops eagerly snatched away by the state.<sup>162</sup>

Though he insisted that the famine was staged as an attack upon the state, the evidence suggests that Stalin was well-aware of the actual plight of the farmers. Party officials privately estimated the death toll to be around 5.5 million in 1933. Four years later, in 1937, census-takers determined the total damage of the famine within Soviet Russia, Soviet Ukraine, and Soviet Kazakhstan. While the exact number of losses is still

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<sup>160</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 198–99

<sup>161</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 33–39.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–46.

a matter of debate today, the Soviet demographers reported that the population of the Soviet Union was approximately eight-million below the estimated number that it should have been, mostly due to the widespread starvation from collectivization. Stalin reviewed their report, which he promptly buried before having the demographers executed.<sup>163</sup>

#### **4. External Counter-Propaganda**

Over time, rumors of the great famine in the Soviet Union began to reach the west. Western reporters snuck through the borders, returning to their home countries with appalling stories of conditions in the Soviet territories. Stalin's regime took measures to actively discredit these rumors. Edouard Herriot, a French politician, was invited to tour the Ukraine and see the conditions in Kiev. The visit was entirely staged. Healthy children were gathered and coached on what to tell the official. Food and goods were placed in shop windows, and automobiles were driven in from a vast radius to create the illusion of a bustling, prosperous city. Sufficiently impressed, Herriot reported to the West that Ukraine was prospering under Soviet rule. Timothy Snyder describes the occasion:<sup>164</sup>

The food was on display, not for sale, for the eyes of a single foreigner... Herriot was driven down Kiev's incomparable avenue, Khreshchatyk. It pulsed with the traffic of automobiles... On 39 August 1933, Herriot visited the Felix Dzierzynski Children's Commune in Kharkiv... What, the Frenchman asked, had the children eaten for lunch?... The children had been prepared for this question, and gave a suitable answer. Herriot believed what he saw and heard. He journeyed onward to Moscow, where he was fed caviar in a palace. The collective farms of Soviet Ukraine, Herriot told the French upon his return, were well-ordered guardens... The story was over.<sup>165</sup>

#### **C. CONCLUSION**

Stalin established a control over the Soviet Union's narrative that remains unrivaled to this day, taking the most successful (and oppressive) measures of Tsarism and Leninism to create his own system. Part of this adaptation was a shift in response to

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<sup>163</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 53.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 57–58.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

Hitler's invasion—the Great Patriotic War ultimately helped Stalin not only tighten his controls over the Soviet Union, but expand his territorial influence immensely. His tactics would prove instructive to future Soviet and Russian leaders, even if not all of them would be as successful in the age of wireless communication.

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## **IV. THE PUTINIST RUSSIAN NARRATIVE**

President Vladimir Putin has incorporated pieces of Tsarism and Stalinism almost seamlessly to build a state that has supported him through a difficult sixteen years. In the midst of NATO expansion, terrorist attacks, and internal protest he has managed to maintain a high approval rating, despite the new obstacles to his authoritarian rule in the twenty-first century.

### **A. THE PUTINIST NARRATIVE**

The Kremlin has come into its own in the art of mass media manipulation in the twenty-first century, combining traditional Tsarist concepts such as Orthodoxy and Pan-Slavism with many of Stalin's tools, including a quasi-cult of personality and a variation on Stalinist censorship.

#### **1. The Influence of Russian Orthodoxy**

For the most part, the current relationship between the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church represents a continuation of elements from both its Soviet and Tsarist predecessors. The church has benefitted tremendously from the dissolution of the Soviet Union—Russian Orthodoxy has become the state religion in all but name. The relationship between church and state is mutually beneficial in this case. Russian Orthodoxy lends aspects of nationalist legitimacy to the state and its actions, while the state ensures that other forms of Christianity are marginalized within Russia.

##### ***a. The Role of the Church in Russia***

The Russian Orthodox Church today has a symbiotic relationship with Putin's regime. Estimates place Orthodox believers at over three-quarters of the Russian population, with the caveat that less than ten percent are regular practitioners.<sup>166</sup> The church lends legitimacy to the state, the president, and elections; not only are priests among those used to monitor voting booths, but "a leading Russian politician positions

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<sup>166</sup> "Russian Orthodox Support for Putin May Backfire," *Proquest*, Oxford Analytica Ltd, 2012, accessed 22 February 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1013534768?accountid=12702>.

himself by sponsoring a pilgrimage, and making religious donations,” according to experts John and Carol Garrard.<sup>167</sup>

Even today, the top echelons of the Russian Orthodox clergy have, at the very least, former ties to Soviet intelligence. KGB reports revealed after the fall of the Soviet Union describe Patriarch Aleksii II as a willing collaborator, “candid and sensible but prepared to talk with considerable openness to the KGB and willing to pass on unflattering tales about his fellow clerics,” according to expert and U.S. diplomat Nathaniel Davis.<sup>168</sup> Upon Aleksii’s death in 2008, he was succeeded by Metropolitan Kirill, another alleged KGB collaborator under the Soviet Union.<sup>169</sup>

Under the leadership of Aleksii II, the Russian Orthodox Church further expanded its authority, reuniting with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.<sup>170</sup> This reunification was made possible through several actions taken under Aleksii II: the canonization of the Romanovs, church acknowledgement of Soviet abuses, and the acknowledgement that Patriarch Sergii’s collaboration with the Soviet Union was forced.<sup>171</sup> President Vladimir Putin played a major role in hosting and endorsing these negotiations.<sup>172</sup> Patriarch Aleksii II died in 2008 and was succeeded by Metropolitan Kirill, who was allegedly also a KGB collaborator under the Soviet Union.<sup>173</sup>

There can be little argument that the Russian Orthodox Church holds great political clout in the Russian Federation. Estimates place Orthodox believers at over

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<sup>167</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, 252.

<sup>168</sup> Davis, *Long Walk to Church*, 81.

<sup>169</sup> Tony Halpin, “Russian Orthodox Church Chooses Between ‘Ex-KGB Candidates’ as Patriarch,” *The Times*, 26 January 2009, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article2100100.ece> (Complete article reprinted on 26 January 2009, accessed on 9 March 2014, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2172196/posts>).

<sup>170</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, 201.

<sup>171</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, 130, 200–01; ROCOR reunion requirements found in Davis, *A Long Walk To Church*, 78.

<sup>172</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, 196–97, 201.

<sup>173</sup> Tony Halpin, “Russian Orthodox Church Chooses Between ‘Ex-KGB Candidates’ as Patriarch,” *The Times*, 26 January 2009, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article2100100.ece> (Complete article reprinted on 26 January 2009, accessed on 9 March 2014, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2172196/posts>).



three-quarters of the Russian population, with the caveat that less than ten percent are regular practitioners.<sup>174</sup> The church lends legitimacy to the state, the president, and elections; not only are priests among those used to monitor voting booths, but “a leading Russian politician positions himself by sponsoring a pilgrimage, and making religious donations,” according to experts John and Carol Garrard.<sup>175</sup> Russian leaders such as President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev attend masses openly and regularly, as seen in pictures of Christmas masses from 2014 (including Figure 24).



Figure 24. President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev attending Christmas masses in 2014<sup>176</sup>

#### ***b. Non-Orthodox Christianity***

Non-Orthodox Christians, including Roman Catholics and Protestants, are technically allowed in Russia.<sup>177</sup> These religious minorities are viewed as non-Russian, Western religions, or as one Russian Orthodox official remarked, “from the West’s money.”<sup>178</sup> While not allowed to proselytize, the private religious freedoms of these groups are protected in theory; in practice, however, Orthodox officials see to it that they

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<sup>174</sup> “Russian Orthodox Support for Putin May Backfire.”

<sup>175</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, 252.

<sup>176</sup> Source: “Orthodox Faithful, Russian Leaders Celebrate Christmas,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 7 January, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/orthodox-christmas-celebrations/26780666.html>.

<sup>177</sup> Clifford J. Levy, “At Expense of All Others, Putin Picks a Church,” *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 24, 2008, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/897132396?accountid=12702>, 2.

<sup>178</sup> Levy, “Putin Picks a Church,” 2.

are denied the opportunity to acquire meeting spaces or property in which to worship openly.<sup>179</sup> While the federal government takes no active role in persecuting Christian minorities, local officials are more easily swayed by Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>180</sup> Other religious minorities (including atheists) find themselves treated in a similar manner.<sup>181</sup> The U.S. State Department International Religious Freedom Report for 2014 reported:

Government authorities detained and imprisoned members of minority religions... Police conducted raids against the private homes and places of worship of minority religious groups disrupting religious services and confiscating religious publications they deemed to be “extremist.” Authorities acted to dissolve some minority religious groups or revoke their status, refused to register other religious organizations, and imposed a number of restrictions that infringed on the religious practices of minority religious groups, in particular Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, and Scientologists, including limiting their ability to obtain land, build places of worship, and obtain restitution of property seized during the Soviet era.<sup>182</sup>

## **2. Great Russia**

The new Russian Federation was born through grievous injuries to its collective ego. For good or for ill, Tsarist Russia had defined itself through its (supposed) religious uniformity, territorial expansion, and military prowess. By contrast, the Soviet Union’s self-image had been based upon the strength of its civic institutions under Communism, and its victory over Fascism in the Great Patriotic War. The collapse of the Soviet Union simultaneously deprived Russia of the ability to take pride in most of these areas. The Soviet Union had been forced to ignominiously retreat from Afghanistan, and the successive Russian state was not only deprived of much Soviet territory but also humiliated in the first Chechen War. Communism had failed, and Russian prestige was at

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<sup>179</sup> Levy, “Putin Picks a Church,” 2.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>181</sup> Garrard and Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, 245–46.

<sup>182</sup> “International Religious Freedom Report for 2014,” U.S. *Department of State*, accessed 08 March 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238426>.

its lowest point in decades. Vladimir Putin needed to re-establish the Great Russian State—and he did it, by cobbling together the pieces that were already there.

**a. *Soviet Legacy***

While the Soviet Union defined itself by more than Russia, the Russian Federation was the nearest thing to a favored child and heir. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia still had the largest land mass of any state in the world, and there were those who believe that Russia deserves to be a leading global power.<sup>183</sup> In a military sense, most of the Soviet Union's forces were passed down to Russia, including the considerable Soviet nuclear arsenal.<sup>184</sup> Russia also inherited the Soviet space program and the glory of victory over the Third Reich in the Great Patriotic War. These accomplishments help fuel Russia's great power status, but borrowed glories can only go so far, especially when dealing with a triumphant NATO (and United States, in particular) that claims victory in the Cold War while seeming to slowly spread its influence eastward.

**b. *NATO Expansion and Russian Insecurity***

The Soviet Union viewed NATO as an adversary, which was not far from the truth, as its primary purpose in the Cold War was common defense under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, many Soviet scholars believed that NATO would dissolve naturally upon the end of the Cold War.<sup>186</sup> In 1990, some Americans and Russians hold that “the United States pledged never to expand NATO eastward if Moscow would agree to the unification of Germany,” in the words of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.<sup>187</sup> On the other hand, U.S. leaders involved in the decision-making process,

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<sup>183</sup> Richard Pipes, “Craving to Be a Great Power,” *The Moscow Times*, 15 July 2009, <http://www.moscowtimes.ru/articles/detail.php?ID=379522&print=Y>.

<sup>184</sup> Joseph Cirincione, *Bomb Scare: The History & Future of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 41–42, 79–80.

<sup>185</sup> David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance's New Role in International Security* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 29.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>187</sup> Mark Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2009), DOI: 10.1080/01636600902773248, 39.

such as former President George H. W. Bush and his Secretary of State James A. Baker, flatly deny that the curtailing of NATO was ever mentioned in negotiations.<sup>188</sup> All available documentation from either side supports Bush's assertion that such a deal was neither offered nor agreed upon.<sup>189</sup>

Russian officials have consistently accused NATO of violating this alleged pledge, especially during its expansions since 1990. In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined NATO against Russia's objections.<sup>190</sup> In 2001 and 2002, controversy flared up when the Vilnius group, consisting of several countries including the Baltic States, attempted to join NATO—most of them would become NATO members in 2004.<sup>191</sup> Albania and Croatia's entry in 2009 and the possibility of NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine are likewise viewed as provocative and a threat against Russian national security.<sup>192</sup>

Another major landmark in NATO-Russia relations is NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo. There was no UN Security Council (UNSC) mandate for the NATO action, but NATO was compelled to occupy the territory due to the continuous acts of brutal ethnic cleansing and human rights violations in the area.<sup>193</sup> Russia voiced strong opposition, claiming that the actions taken "against Yugoslavia not only constituted a violation of the UN Charter but also that it contravened the NATO treaty," in the words of German scholars Hannes Adomeit and Frank Kupferschmidt.<sup>194</sup> It should be noted that, in proceeding without a UN mandate, NATO had effectively denied Russia the

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<sup>188</sup> Kramer, "Myth," 39–42.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.; this paragraph originally appeared in thesis author's final exam, NS 3720, 22 March 2014.

<sup>190</sup> Kramer, "Myth," 40.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid; Mark Kramer, "Russia, the Baltic Region, and the Challenge for NATO," *PONARS Eurasia*, Policy Memo No. 267, July 2013, 2.

<sup>192</sup> Sergei Karaganov, "Russia's Choice," *Survival* 52, no. 1 (February-March 2010), 7; David J. Kramer, "Resetting US-Russian Relations: It Takes Two," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2010), DOI: 10.1080/01636600903418694, 63; this paragraph originally appeared in thesis author's final exam, NS 3720, 22 March 2014.

<sup>193</sup> John Van Oudenaren and Ronald Tiersky, "Europe and Russia," in *European Foreign Policies*, ed. Ronald Tiersky and John Van Oudenaren (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Little Field Publishers, 2010), 80.

<sup>194</sup> Hannes Adomeit and Frank Kupferschmidt, "Russia-NATO Relations: Stagnation or Revitalization?" *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Paper*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, May 2008, 7.

ability to employ its veto power as a permanent member of the UNSC. In 2008, when Russia invaded Georgia to, ostensibly, liberate Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the precedent set by the Allied invasion of Kosovo was used to justify the action.<sup>195</sup> Timing is everything, and the conflict with Russia played a major factor in NATO's decision not to extend a Membership Action Plan to Georgia.<sup>196</sup>

The idea of taking its place as a purely regional power or as a secondary partner in any alliance is distasteful and demeaning, given Russia's status as one of "the world's leading powers," according to President Putin.<sup>197</sup> His February 2007 speech in Munich makes Putin's stance transparent, objecting vehemently to NATO expansion as a "serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust."<sup>198</sup> Putin cites an alleged 1990 agreement to keep NATO from expanding beyond Germany and, further, complains of NATO placing military fortifications and units on Russia's borders.<sup>199</sup> Putin accuses the United States of unilateralism and an attempt to create a "unipolar world," inferring hypocrisy in Western politics: "We are constantly being taught about democracy, but for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves."<sup>200</sup> Putin does have a few positive comments about the West, including praise for the joint effort with Russia's "American friends" in the "non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction."<sup>201</sup>

### *c. Frozen Conflicts*

Russia maintains an adversarial attitude towards NATO, taking action whenever possible to ensure that former Soviet states do not join. The 2008 invasion and subsequent partition of Georgia was a heavy-handed and successful attempt to keep

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<sup>195</sup> Oudenaren and Tiersky, "Europe and Russia," 80

<sup>196</sup> Adomeith and Kupferschmidt, "Russia-NATO Relations," 18; this paragraph originally appeared in thesis author's final exam, NS 3720, 22 March 2014.

<sup>197</sup> Vladimir Putin, Annual Address to the Federal Assembly, 10 May 2006, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823\\_type70029type82912\\_105566.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823_type70029type82912_105566.shtml).

<sup>198</sup> Vladimir Putin, Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, delivered 11 February 2007, *President of Russia Official Web Portal*, accessed 11 February 2014, [http://kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2007/02/11/0138\\_type82914type84779\\_118135.shtml](http://kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2007/02/11/0138_type82914type84779_118135.shtml).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid; this paragraph originally appeared in thesis author's final exam, NS 3720, 22 March 2014.

Georgia from joining NATO. The 2014 annexation of Crimea is one of many threats previously made against Ukraine in the event that it joined NATO; at one point Putin inferred that were Ukraine to enter the alliance, Russia would “be forced to target its nuclear offensive systems at Ukraine,” in self-defense.<sup>202</sup> Moldavia has also felt the grip of Russian hegemony while trying to deal with the separatist Transnistria movement—Russia prevents NATO from any peacekeeping involvement in the area while supporting the separation with Russian armed forces as a “stability factor” in the region.<sup>203</sup>

### **3. Russianness**

Even today, Russians have a somewhat stunted sense of nationalism. Language and ethnic heritage play a role, as does patriotism and pan-Slavism, but the Russian people have endured two major revolutions in the past century: the October Revolution of 1917, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Most of today’s Russians grew up under the Soviet system, under which Russian nationalism was more a matter of Soviet citizenship than a solid cultural identity.

#### ***a. Russian Pluralism and Morality***

In theory, Russia is a civic nation-state that welcomes all cultures and religions. There are, however, strict controls in place to ensure that Orthodoxy remains the dominant Christian religion (as previously mentioned). While many areas of Russia are diverse, not all Russians are accepting of other perceived cultures. A 2009 study involving the survey of 2,455 middle school students in 39 different Russian schools found a significant amount of xenophobia. According to Ekaterina Dobrynina, a majority of Russian students supported six of thirteen intolerant statements:

Six statements were approved by the majority of those asked, for example... that some of the ethnic groups in Russia are “backward and undeveloped,” that there are peoples whose presence in Russia must be restricted and “harmful nationalities,” that “the most important religion in Russian should be Russian orthodoxy,” and others. And it is small comfort that “only” less than half of the young people believe that barriers must be

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<sup>202</sup> Adomeith and Kupferschmidt, “Russia-NATO Relations,” 18.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid; this paragraph originally appeared in thesis author’s final exam, NS 3720, 22 March 2014.

established to allowing “people of some nationalities” into power and that “only Russian people can be patriots of Russia,” and so forth.<sup>204</sup>

Orthodox Church leaders vocally support conservative Russian values, but the state is also careful to foster a strict moral code in line with Orthodoxy. In a 2000 interview, Putin argued the importance of “moral values,” and added that Russians “will fight to keep our geographical and spiritual position.”<sup>205</sup> In 2013, Putin attacked the West’s “non-traditional values” in his annual state of the nation address: “This destruction of traditional values from above not only entails negative consequences for society, but is also inherently anti-democratic because it is based on an abstract notion and runs counter to the will of the majority of people.”<sup>206</sup>

#### ***b. Russian Nationalism***

The Russian Federation has returned to certain elements of Russian nationalism and irredentism, particularly in the past few years. The majority of Russia’s frozen conflicts were justified as protecting ethnic Russians outside of Russia, including the annexation of Ukraine. Despite claims to the contrary, there is significant photographic and anecdotal evidence of Russia’s significant support of the Ukrainian rebels in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Putin has claimed on multiple occasions that these Russian service members are not fighting with the rebels on orders, but have taken leave to volunteer, as their individual consciences dictate.<sup>207</sup>

### **4. Cult of Personality**

Putin enjoys strong approval ratings at home and is a respected leader around the world; indeed, his approval has skyrocketed in conflicts with the West, particularly the

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<sup>204</sup> Ekaterina Donryna, “A ‘C’ Grade in Tolerance,” *Russian Social Science Review*, vol. 50, no. 5 (September–October 2009), 40 33–47.

<sup>205</sup> Vladimir Putin, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait By Russia’s President*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 169.

<sup>206</sup> Damien McElroy, “Vladimir Putin Claims Russia is Moral Compass of the World,” *The Telegraph*, 12 December 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/10513330/Vladimir-Putin-claims-Russia-is-moral-compass-of-the-world.html>.

<sup>207</sup> “NATO Chief Accuses Russia of ‘Direct’ Military Involvement in Ukraine,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (website), 29 August 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-nato-/26555896.html>.

Crimean annexation, the Ukrainian conflict, and other recent disputes. His following also has many of the aspects of a modern cult of personality: a masculine, secular sovereign with the support of the people, using mass media and cult products to foster a positive image. The last piece of modern cults of personality is for the society to be isolated from the rest of the world, and Russia is ostensibly an open society. Even this, however, has been used to strengthen the power of its narrative.

*a. Secular Sovereignty*

As with most modern heads of state, Putin must at least maintain the ability to claim election through democratic means. As President of the Russian Federation, he was elected three times (in 2000, 2004, and 2012). The Russian constitution forbids one from serving in more than two consecutive terms, so Prime Minister Sergei Medvedev ran for and was elected president in 2008, and immediately appointed Putin as prime minister. Putin's first election, in 2000, was mired in accusations of voting fraud. The previous president, Boris Yeltsin, has resigned the office to Putin on 31 December 1999, making Putin the incumbent. News stations such as Public Russian Television and Russian Television and Radio were quick to show positive stories about the sitting president, while oligarchs moved to back the obvious front-runner. Still, Putin barely received over half of the popular votes in the first round, amid accusations of vote-stealing from his rivals.<sup>208</sup>

Putin's political party plays a major role in his continued electoral successes. In 2001, Putin's team worked to merge the Unity party with three other major factions, forming a dominant party known as United Russia. The new party would hold an easy majority, allowing its members to dominate the parliament and consistently control the outcome of the presidential elections. Moreover, laws were passed to ensure that smaller parties would never have the opportunity to gain power—any political party must have over 40,000 members, with branches in at least half of Russia's twelve regions. The new legislation ensured that the number of competing political parties dramatically dropped,

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<sup>208</sup> Michael McFaul and Nikolai Petrov, "Elections," in *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform*, ed. Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov, and Andrei Ryabov (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 48–49.



from over forty registered parties in 2003 to only fourteen parties in 2008, as smaller parties found themselves unable to qualify. While Putin has never officially joined United Russia, the party has consistently worked to back the president.<sup>209</sup>

Putin is a secular authority, but enjoys a sacral status approaching that of a modern tsar. The Russian government has taken steps to improve relations with the Russian Orthodox Church since the collapse of the Soviet Union, culminating in the invitation of Patriarch Kirill to reside at the Kremlin in 2011.<sup>210</sup> In turn, Kirill praised the then-prime minister, calling Putin a “miracle of God,” who “personally played a massive role in correcting this crooked twist of our history.”<sup>211</sup> Putin received similar support from Jewish and Muslim leaders in the 2012 election, securing religious support from every mainstream Russian religion.<sup>212</sup> This close tie between church and state soon led to the Pussy Riot scandal (the second case study of this chapter).

#### **b. Masculinity**

Putin’s masculinity provides the bedrock to his public persona, with events regularly filmed (and staged) to show the leader as a man of action. His involvement with Judo is well-documented (see Figure 25). Not only is he the author of his own book on Judo (*Judo: History, Theory, Practice*), but he holds a fifth-dan black belt in Judo in addition to an honorary eighth-degree black belt in Kyokushin-kan karate and an

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<sup>209</sup> Thomas F. Remington, “Parliament and the Dominant Party Regime,” in *Return to Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 53–55.

<sup>210</sup> Marc Bennetts, “In Putin’s Russia, Little Separation between Church and State,” *The Washington Times*, 13 August 2012, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/aug/13/putin-russia-little-separation-church-state/?page=all>.

<sup>211</sup> Glib Bryanski, “Russian Patriarch Calls Putin Era ‘Miracle of God,’” *Reuters*, 8 February 2012, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-putin-religion-idUKTRE81722Y20120208>.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

honorary ninth-degree black belt in Tae-kwon-do (giving him the title of “grand master” and placing him in a rank above renowned martial artist Chuck Norris).<sup>213</sup>

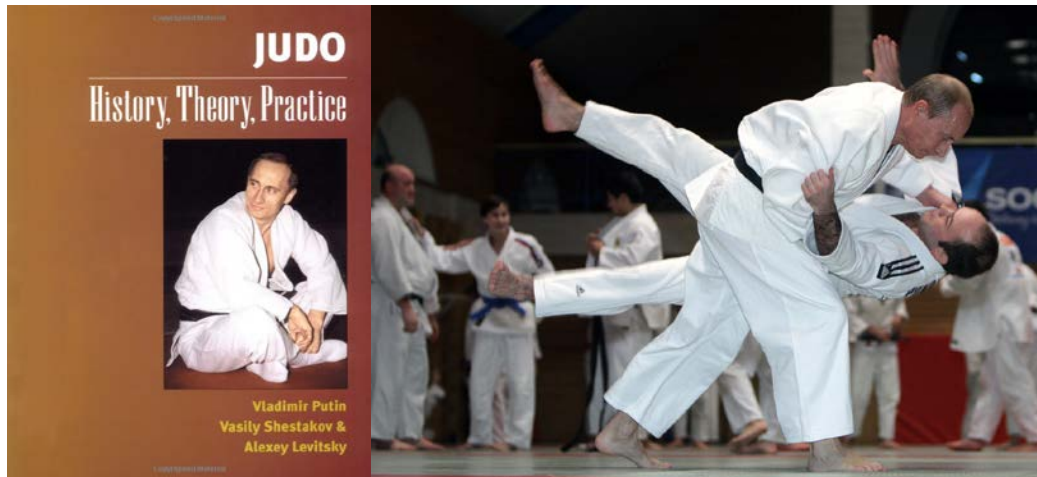


Figure 25. Putin’s Judo, as seen on the cover of his book, *Judo: History, Theory, Practice*, and in a December 2009 training session in St. Petersburg.<sup>214</sup>

In *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President*, Putin describes himself as a “hooligan” in his youth, claiming, “It was sports that dragged me off the streets.”<sup>215</sup> Martial arts are only the beginning of his machismo—the Russian leader’s holidays are often opportunities to show off his physique and prowess. His publicized activities are extensive, including target practice, motorcycle-riding, racecar-driving, swimming (in frigid Siberian lakes), fishing, hunting (lethal and non-lethal, hunting everything from bears and tigers to whales), diving (via SCUBA or submersible),

<sup>213</sup> “Judo: History, Theory, Practice,” *Amazon.com*, last accessed 2 January 2016, [http://www.amazon.com/Judo-History-Practice-Vladimir-Putin/dp/1556434456/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1451717368&sr=1-3](http://www.amazon.com/Judo-History-Practice-Vladimir-Putin/dp/1556434456/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1451717368&sr=1-3); Cheryl K. Chumley, “Vladimir Putin Earns 8th-degree Black Belt in Karate,” *The Washington Times*, 25 November 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/nov/25/vladimir-putin-earns-8th-degree-black-belt-in-kara/>; Ryan Craggs, “Vladimir Putin Earns 9th Degree Black Belt In Taekwondo, Because That’s What Vladimir Putin Does,” *The Huffington Post*, 13 November 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/13/putin-black-belt\\_n\\_4269536.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/13/putin-black-belt_n_4269536.html).

<sup>214</sup> Source: “Judo: History, Theory, Practice,” *Amazon.com*; Ryan Craggs, “Vladimir Putin Earns 9th Degree Black Belt.”

<sup>215</sup> Putin, *First Person*, 18, 19.

hang-gliding, hiking, figure-skating, ice hockey, firefighting, bottle-feeding elk, and playing the piano.<sup>216</sup>

Many of these activities are clearly staged for publicity. A highly-publicized SCUBA diving expedition was reported successful when Putin surfaced with two Greek amphorae. The pro-Kremlin *RT* (originally *Russia Today*) news website was quick to praise the leader: “The PM put on a diving suit and dived deep into the Taman Bay where, to everyone’s utter surprise, he managed to find two ancient amphorae dating back to the 6th century AD.”<sup>217</sup> Other media outlets soon questioned the lack of moss on the artifacts, and it was later disclosed that the amphorae had deliberately been placed for Putin to discover them.<sup>218</sup> Putin also admitted in a news interview that some of the events with endangered species were staged, complaining about the somewhat fallacious exposure: “Of course, there are excesses. And I’m annoyed about it.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> “Premier Treasure-Hunting: Putin Dives into ‘Russian Atlantis,’” *RT*, last modified 13 August 2011, <https://www.rt.com/news/putin-amphorae-dive-archeology/>; Walter Hickey and Geoffrey Ingersoll, “43 Photos That Show Vladimir Putin Doesn’t Mess Around,” *Business Insider*, 6 September 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/43-pictures-vladimir-putin-tough-2013-9?op=1>.

<sup>217</sup> “Premier Treasure-Hunting.”

<sup>218</sup> “Vladimir Putin’s Chief Spokesman Admits Greek Urn Find Was Staged,” *The Guardian*, 6 October 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/06/vladimir-putin-spokesman-urns-staged>.

<sup>219</sup> “Russia’s Putin Admits Wildlife Stunts Are Staged,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 24 September 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/putin-admits-wildlife-stunts-are-stages/24707885.html>.



Figure 26. Putin on holiday (cropped photographs). Left, Putin “managed to find” two ancient amphorae that had been staged for a photo opportunity; right, Putin hiking shirtless in Siberia.<sup>220</sup>



Figure 27. Putin on holiday, performing the butterfly stroke in an allegedly-frigid Siberian lake.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Source: Hickey and Ingersoll, “43 Photos.”

<sup>221</sup> Source: Hickey and Ingersoll, “43 Photos.”

*c. Universality*

Unlike Stalin, Putin's image remains a Russian one, though he generally avoids making statements that will offend Russian minorities, and he regularly meets with non-Christian religious community leaders. Russia officially recognizes four Russian religions: Christianity (Orthodoxy), Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism.<sup>222</sup> While mass media is not flooded with photographs of Putin interacting with non-Orthodox religious figures, the meetings are a regular enough occurrence that such photographs are relatively easy to find (see Figures 28 and 29).



Figure 28. Putin meets with Muftis of Russia's Muslim Spiritual Administrations<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 168.

<sup>223</sup> Source: "Vladimir Putin Met with Muftis of Russia's Muslim Spiritual Administrations," *Russia Mufties Council*, last accessed 1 March 2015, <http://muslim.ru/en/articles/127/4804/>.





Figure 29. Putin visits a Buddhist monastery in Buryatia<sup>224</sup>

**d. Media and Cult Products**

The cult of Putin is unique in that it seems to come from above and from below. Propaganda praising the leader began while he was the interim president before the 2000 elections, with constant positive television coverage and his autobiographical book. By 2001, however, Putin began appearing in locally-produced paraphernalia. Vendors began stocking portraits, figures, and other gear depicting the president, not because of state production, but market demand. For lack of a better word, President Putin was cool—a world leader with a pop culture following. In 2002, an all-female musical group released a radio hit entitled, “A Man Like Putin,” which ended up on the Russian Top 10 for four months.<sup>225</sup> Fan clubs sprung up around the leader. His name was used without permission for products ranging from Putinka vodka to “Puin” canned goods (with the state symbol placed between the “u” and “i,” to act as the “t”). Putin’s celebrity status

<sup>224</sup> “Putin in Siberia to Salute Buddhism and the Religion’s Important Role in Russian History,” *The Siberian Times*, 12 April 2013, <http://siberiantimes.com/business/investment/news/putin-in-siberia-to-salute-buddhism-and-the-religions-important-role-in-russian-history/>.

<sup>225</sup> Anna Arutunyan notes that the song itself was not intended to fuel praise of Putin but as political satire—nevertheless, it ended up having the opposite of the desired effect, adding to the leader’s popularity; “Такого как Путин / One Like Putin, English Subs,” Youtube, uploaded 6 December 2008, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zk\\_VszbZa\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zk_VszbZa_s); Anna Arutunyan, *The Putin Mystique* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2015), 218–19.

meshes well with the existing state narrative—Putin’s massive approval and popularity is no great surprise.<sup>226</sup>

*e. Open Society*

Russia does not have closed borders. On the contrary, Russia trades openly with the rest of the world, and Russians are free to travel the globe—an estimated ten million Russians engage in tourism every year. This flies in the face of the final requirement for a modern personality cult—the states of the twentieth-century cults had closed borders to prevent its citizenry from realizing that they had been duped. It could be argued, however, that this mutation strengthens the cult, rather than weakening it. Under the Tsarist and Stalinist regimes, a Russian facing oppression had two options: submit or rebel. Putin’s regime provides another alternative, in the form of an exit. Those that are dissatisfied with the economy or the regime may simply leave Russia, thereby reducing the numbers of the dissidents and weakening those that stay to attempt change. In his article “Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism,” Ivan Krastev summates this interaction:

The major reason why Russians are reluctant to protest is not fear; it is because the people who care most have already left the country or have resolved to do so in the near future—or they may simply have moved to the virtual reality of the Internet (Russians on average spend twice as much time using online social networks as do their Western counterparts).<sup>227</sup>

**5. Censorship**

Gorbachev’s glasnost (“openness”) and Yeltsin’s democracy contributed to the end of the Soviet Union, and the floundering of the fledgling Russian Federation. Putin has slowly but unerringly reverted to censorship tactics that seem to come straight out of Stalinism. In the twenty-first century Russian Federation, directives are implied or issued in secrecy, and alternative narratives are quashed with minimal involvement from the state.

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<sup>226</sup> Arutunyan, *Putin Mystique*, 218–20.

<sup>227</sup> Ivan Krastev, “Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism,” in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, ed. Patrick H. O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 2013), 503, 508.

**a. *Deliberate Obfuscation***

As “hands on” as Putin may appear in his posted photographs, his directives are often secret or indirect. When protesters seized control of the Ukrainian presidential palace in February 2014, then-President Victor Yanukovych was nowhere to be found.<sup>228</sup> Russia did not admit to involvement in his departure until eight months later, when Vladimir Putin announced that his government had helped Yanukovych flee to Crimea and ultimately to Russia.<sup>229</sup> In the same year, Putin sent Russian forces to secure Crimea, holding a supposedly open and fair referendum to determine whether or not Crimea should secede from Ukraine (very few states or global institutions have recognized the referendum as legitimate, to date). Putin initially denied Russian involvement, but later it was revealed that the “polite men” were sent into Crimea to secure the area before the vote.<sup>230</sup>

**b. *Attacking Alternative Narratives***

Active censorship is generally carried out without any direct involvement from the state. In 2014, a Russian journalist named Roman Romanenko wrote a tongue-in-cheek letter to President Putin, requesting that troops be sent to secure his own province, as there were Russian speakers there who were also denied basic human necessities and rights. The letter was never meant to be published, but somehow it found its way into social media. The response was vicious, pointed, and completely unofficial. Nazi swastikas and anti-Euromaidan graffiti appeared on the front of his home. Notices were sent to his neighbors: “To the knowledge of the residents of this apartment block—there is a Lviv scum living in your neighborhood who supports the West and the destruction of

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<sup>228</sup> William Booth and Will Englund, “Ukraine’s Yanukovych Missing as Protesters Take Control of Presidential Residence in Kiev,” *Washington Post*, 22 February 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ukraines-president-open-to-early-vote-polish-leader-says-scores-reported-killed-in-clashes/2014/02/21/05d3de46-9a82-11e3-b931-0204122c514b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ukraines-president-open-to-early-vote-polish-leader-says-scores-reported-killed-in-clashes/2014/02/21/05d3de46-9a82-11e3-b931-0204122c514b_story.html).

<sup>229</sup> “Putin Admits Helping Yanukovych Flee,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 24 October 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/putin-yanukovych-ukraine-russia-flee/26654834.html>.

<sup>230</sup> “Putin Reveals Secrets of Russia’s Crimea Takeover Plot,” *BBC News*, 9 March 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31796226>.



Ukraine, blah-blah. Beware! The apartment of Romanenko, a Ukrainian Jew, may be used as an undercover headquarters of Ukrainian ‘patriots.’”<sup>231</sup>

Romanenko’s treatment is hardly unique, and extends not only to protesters but also would-be political rivals.<sup>232</sup> Protests and anti-Putin political meetings are often cancelled or broken up, either by thugs or police; the presentation of former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov’s openly-critical book, *Without Putin*, was prevented not only with a sudden loss of electricity but also twenty men who prevented entry to the event.<sup>233</sup> Gary Kasparov faced harassment (in the form of flung ketchup, hurled eggs, and suddenly-closed meeting spaces) and a mass-media blackout while running for the presidency in 2008.<sup>234</sup> Boris Nemtsov, a vocal opponent of Putin, was assassinated in Moscow, on February 2015.<sup>235</sup>

Political tools and regulations also play a role. Kasyanov and Aleksey Navalny were denied candidacy as president in 2008 and 2015—allegedly, over 13% of the required two million signatures for Kasyanov’s bid were illegitimate, while Navalny’s party “registration was canceled after courts in 25 regions ruled that the Party of Progress’ offices had not been registered within the required time,” according to *RT News*.<sup>236</sup> Political rival Mikhail Khodorkovsky, originally sentenced to eight years in prison in 2004 for fraud and tax evasion, had his prison term extended by an additional

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<sup>231</sup> Ivan Belyayev, “‘Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich, I Speak Russian, Too. Please Send Troops!’” , *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 19, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-journalist-writes-putin-for-help/25302977.html>.

<sup>232</sup> Graeme Gill, *Building an Authoritarian Polity: Russia in Post-Soviet Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 43–44.

<sup>233</sup> “Russian Opposition Leader’s Book Premiere Blocked in Kyiv,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 18 December 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian\\_Opposition\\_Leaders\\_Book\\_Premiere\\_Blocked\\_In\\_Kyiv/1907723.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Opposition_Leaders_Book_Premiere_Blocked_In_Kyiv/1907723.html).

<sup>234</sup> Masha Gessen, *The Man without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (London: Riverhead Book, 2012), 192–97.

<sup>235</sup> Gill, *Building an Authoritarian Polity*, 44.

<sup>236</sup> “Fake Signature Probe Could Sink Presidential Bid,” *RT*, 24 January 2008, <https://www.rt.com/politics/fake-signature-probe-could-sink-presidential-bid/>; “Ex-PM Kasyanov Banned from Presidential Election,” *RT*, 5 February 2008, <https://www.rt.com/news/ex-pm-kasyanov-banned-from-presidential-election/>; “Opposition Threatens Legal Action as Authorities Strip Navalny’s Party of Registration,” *RT*, 29 April 2015, <https://www.rt.com/politics/254061-russia-navalny-party-registration/>.

five-and-a-half years in 2010.<sup>237</sup> Voices against Putin are quickly silenced, in ways that cannot be traced back to the upper echelons of Russian government.

## **B. CASE STUDY: PUSSY RIOT**

Pussy Riot presents an alternative narrative to Putin's Russia, attacking the regime for its corruption and human rights abuses. Their contrasting propaganda attacks Russia on almost all fronts, an argument against the Russian Orthodox Church's relationship with the state, the purported moral ascendancy of Russian people, and Putin's leadership over the federation.

### **1. An Alternate Narrative: Holy Fools**

Pussy Riot claims that its protests are a form of "holy foolishness," and that they themselves are "fools for Christ." Holy foolishness is a (counter) cultural Russian Orthodox tradition of using radical and unorthodox behavior as a means of peaceful protest. The concept is based on Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians:<sup>238</sup>

It seems to me that God has given the very last place to us apostles, like people condemned to die in public as a spectacle for the whole world of angels and of human beings. For Christ's sake we are fools... We are clothed in rags, we are beaten... We are no more than this world's garbage; we are the scum of the earth to this very moment! (1 Cor 4:9-13)

Pussy Riot takes the idea of holy foolishness to an extreme. The use of English verbiage in the band name is a deliberate, provocative choice: in English, the word "pussy" is only dirty in one of its two meanings: a cat or a vagina. By contrast, there is no colloquial or even polite term for a vagina in Russian, however, so it can only be translated into Russian as *pizda*, a vulgar term for the female reproductive organ. One of the band members, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, was nine months pregnant in 2008, when she took part in a filmed orgy in a protest performance entitled, "Fuck for the Successor, Little Bear," an obscene jab at Medvedev (Putin's successor). At another point, a

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<sup>237</sup> "Khodorkovsky Gets 13.5 Years' Prison," *RT*, 30 December 2010, <https://www.rt.com/politics/khodorkovsky-verdict-second-trial/>; Khodorkovsky was pardoned by Putin in 2013, and left Russia to take up residence in Switzerland.

<sup>238</sup> Priscilla Hunt, "Holy Foolishness as a Key to Russian Culture," in *Holy Foolishness in Russia: New Perspectives*, ed. Priscilla Hunt and Svitlana Kobets (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2011), 2.

different member of the band “was videotaped in a supermarket trying to stuff a raw chicken into her vagina,” according to journalist Anna Arutunyan.<sup>239</sup>

On 21 February 2012, five members of Pussy Riot entered the Christ the Savior Cathedral, Russia’s largest church. Three of them ascended the stairs to the altar, entering an area reserved for priests alone according to church dogma. Provocatively dressed in bright tights and balaclavas, they began to dance while lip syncing to their song, “Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away” (see Appendix for full lyrics). Guards were quick to arrive, ejecting the protesters rapidly. A representative of the Church denounced the band, claiming, “This is a sin that violates the law of God... for the wages of sin is death (a reference to Romans 6:23). In early March, following Putin’s election, the performers were arrested and put on trial for “felony hooliganism” and “blasphemy.”<sup>240</sup>



Figure 30. Pussy Riot protest in Christ the Savior Cathedral<sup>241</sup>

Pussy Riot is one of several activist groups that reject the narrative of Putin’s Russia in nearly every way. When Putin and Medvedev announced in 2011 that Putin

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<sup>239</sup> Arutunyan, *Putin Mystique*, 20–21.

<sup>240</sup> Court Transcript, as recorded in *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer for Freedom* (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), 53.

<sup>241</sup> Source: “Pussy Riot: The Story So Far,” *BBC News*, 23 December 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25490161>.

would be running for a third term in office, there were mass protests. Activists chanted phrases to tear down Putin: “You are not a Tsar, not a God,” (an attack on Putin’s support from the Russian Orthodox Church) and “I do not want you” (an attempt to remove some of Putin’s masculine appeal).<sup>242</sup> The day after Putin’s electoral victory, another politician referred to the elections as “tantamount to rape,” according to Anna Arutunyan.<sup>243</sup>

Pussy Riot’s song, “Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away,” makes similar arguments against the Putinist narrative. The song attacks the Orthodox Church for misogyny: “In order not to offend His Holiness / Women must give birth and love / Shit, shit, the Lord’s shit!”<sup>244</sup> Then the lyrics call for the Virgin Mary to become a feminist, and rails against the ties of church and state, demanding, “Patriarch Gundyaev believes in Putin / Bitch, better believe in God instead.”<sup>245</sup>

Despite their shock tactics, the band’s members have proven more than capable of expressing their views in a more articulate and coherent manner. In an open letter to Patriarch Kirill, the band members explained, “In the prayer in question, we expressed our grief... that you had allowed the religion to become a weapon in a dirty political campaign.”<sup>246</sup> A similar letter addressed to President Medvedev mentioned suppressive atrocities committed by the regime, including the long-term imprisonment of Putin’s political rivals and detractors.<sup>247</sup>

## **2. Censorship**

Putin has dealt with Pussy Riot in a manner characteristic of his regime. There have been no public directives from the upper echelons of the Russian state concerning the three women. Nevertheless, the band was imprisoned for their actions in the

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<sup>242</sup> Arutunyan, *Putin Mystique*, 16–17.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>244</sup> See Appendix for full transcript, from *Pussy Riot*, 13–14.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Pussy Riot*, 26.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–35.

cathedral, and it would not be the last time that they would be attacked for their statements.

**a. *Deliberate Obfuscation***

Putin has been careful to express his displeasure without directly tying himself to the court case. Days after the election, a spokesman declared that Putin's view of the band's "disgusting" protest was "negative."<sup>248</sup> In an interview for Russia Today, the state-controlled English language news channel, Putin asked the reporter to translate the band's name into Russian, pointing out the unavoidable obscenity with a proper translation, undermining the moral fiber of the Russian populace.<sup>249</sup> Putin adopted a more lenient tone at other times, expressing his hope that "the court issues a correct decision," and that the band members should not be punished "too strictly."<sup>250</sup>

**b. *Attacking Pussy Riot***

Putin's supporters were quick to latch onto his message. Patriarch Kirill fully supported incarceration for the band, and attacked them openly: "Those people don't believe in the power of prayer, they believe in the power of propaganda, in the power of lies and slander, in the power of Internet and mass media, in the power of money and weapons."<sup>251</sup> Other forms of attack seemed to come from the general Russian populace. At a Russian youth festival in 2013, a video game entitled "Don't Let Pussy Riot into the Cathedral" was released, in which players would kill balaclava-wearing band members with a gold Orthodox cross before the performers could reach a cathedral.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Arutunyan, *Putin Mystique*, 21.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 13–14

<sup>250</sup> "Putin: Pussy Riot Should Not Be Punished 'Too Strictly,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2 August 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/pussy-riot-trial-halted-by-bomb-threat/24664343.html>.

<sup>251</sup> "Russian Patriarch Says Punk Band 'Desecrated' Church," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 25 March 2012, [http://www.rferl.org/content/russia\\_church\\_punk\\_band\\_pussy\\_riot\\_/24526352.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/russia_church_punk_band_pussy_riot_/24526352.html).

<sup>252</sup> "Orthodox Video Game Targets Pussy Riot," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 15 July 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/video-game-pussy-riot-orthodox-church-russia/25046855.html>.



Figure 31. “Don’t Let Pussy Riot into the Cathedral”<sup>253</sup>

While there is no concrete evidence tying Putin to the verdict, his insinuated directives seem to have been followed to the letter. The three women were taken to trial on charges of “felony hooliganism,” as well as having “mocked and challenged Orthodox Christendom by exerting negative psycho-emotional influence on a group of believers.”<sup>254</sup> The prosecution recommended two to three years of incarceration for each of the three protesters. Initially, all three of the accused retained the services of lawyer Mark Feygin, whose passionate defense made the trial even more political and inflammatory. In October, Yekaterina Samutsevich switched to a less fiery attorney, who simply pointed out that the guard had stopped Samutsevich before she began performing. All three women were sentenced to two years in a penal colony, but the non-political approach was enough to have Samutsevich’s sentence suspended.<sup>255</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The 2012 trial and subsequent incarceration of the two Pussy Riot members were characteristic of Putin’s regime in a defensive posture. While making no decrees to attack

<sup>253</sup> Source: “Orthodox Video Game.”

<sup>254</sup> *Pussy Riot*, 53.

<sup>255</sup> Arutunyan, *Putin Mystique*, 22–23.

the band, Putin did express his displeasure and his thoughts on sentencing—wishes that were carried out. In doing so, the state avoided blame for any possible blowback from the incident, while essentially condoning attacks upon the perpetrators. This practice would continue at the Sochi Olympics, with regular state harassment and interference of the band, independent of public orders from the higher echelons of the government.

### **C. CASE STUDY: WINTER OLYMPICS IN SOCHI, 2014**

The Winter Olympics in Sochi was, at the time, the centerpiece of positive Russian propaganda. Nevertheless, it faced its detractors and dissidents, both from within and without. The case is best examined in a non-chronological, thematic order: the intended Russian narrative (both as presented before the games, and during the Olympic opening ceremonies), followed by critical attacks and controversies, and finally the regime's response to those attacks. Ultimately, the event illustrated the Russian message and the current regime's response to dissident narratives.

#### **1. Russian Narrative**

The Sochi Olympics were intended to bolster Russian prominence through every aspect of its narrative under Putin's leadership. In the years leading up to the games, vast resources were devoted to making the games a demonstration of the new Russian Federation. At the opening ceremonies, however, Russia was unable to cite modern achievements, and had to rely upon the heritage of Tsarist and Soviet achievement almost exclusively.

##### ***a. Modern Narrative***

The Olympics in Sochi represented the Putinist Russian narrative in multiple aspects. The transformation of Sochi itself, from an obsolete and snowy city to a winter games resort, was meant to establish Russian greatness, with incredible expense: Russia spent an estimated \$51 billion on the spectacle.<sup>256</sup> According to *RT News*, "at the torch relay ceremony, the Russian president said the Olympic flame would travel through all

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<sup>256</sup> "Nemtsov Alleges Billions Embezzled From Sochi Olympics," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 30 May 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-nemtsov-sochi-billions-embezzled/25002191.html>.

regions of country, and ‘will show Russia to the world as it really is, as the one we all love.’ Russia’s scale, unique character and beauty, including its natural and cultural wealth, will be on full display during the relay, Putin said.”<sup>257</sup> Putin’s own image was boosted primarily through media coverage of his personal involvement with the event. The *RT* news website claimed that Putin personally arrived in Sochi a year before the Olympics to monitor the site’s progress, giving officials a hard time over delays and even firing the vice-president of Russia’s Olympic Committee.<sup>258</sup> Naturally, Putin would be centrally-placed as the head-of-state during the Olympic ceremonies and games as well (see Figure 32).

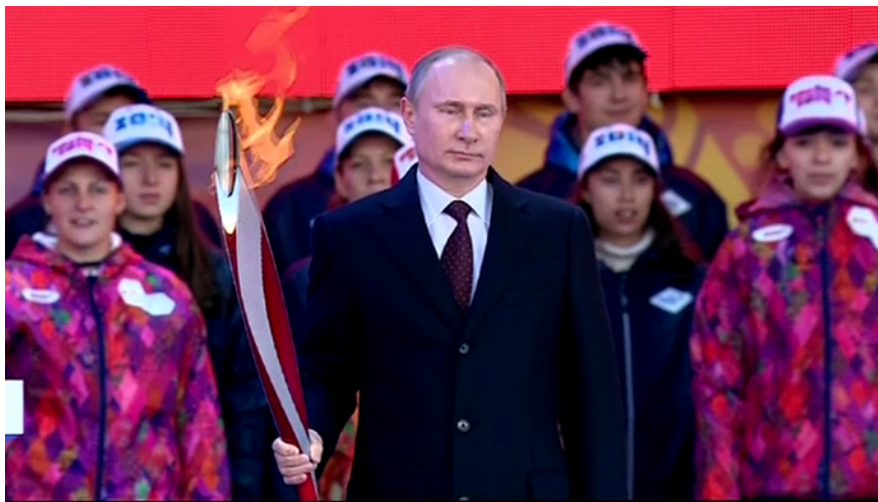


Figure 32. Putin with the Olympic torch in Moscow’s Red Square.<sup>259</sup>

#### ***b. Claimed Continuities with Previous Regimes***

The Olympic opening ceremony laid claim to Tsarist and Soviet achievements, in both culture and technology. The initial pageant was a tribute to Russian and Soviet advancements. Among the Tsarist Russian narrative claims were Fyodor Dostoevsky (novelist), Catherine the Great, Vasily Zhukovsky (poet), Peter the Great (referenced not

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<sup>257</sup> “On Your Marks! Olympic Torchbearers Set Off from Moscow,” *RT*, 6 October 2013, <https://www.rt.com/news/russia-welcomes-olympic-torch-793/>.

<sup>258</sup> “Putin Slams Sochi Delays, Fires Olympic Committee Deputy,” *RT*, 7 February 2013, <https://www.rt.com/news/sochi-2014-putin-official-dismissal-635/>.

<sup>259</sup> Source: “On Your Marks!” *RT*.



only by the boat upon which the children in the pageant traveled but also the “Russian Empire” slide with his likeness), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (composer), Kazimir Malevich (painter), Dmitri Mendeleev’s periodic table, Sergei Diaghilev’s Russian ballet, the television (Russian scientist Constantin Perskyi did not invent the television, but did coin the term), the ushanka winter hat, Khokhloma painting style, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (his work on rocketry belonged to both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union), Anton Chekhov (playwright), Alexey Shchusev (architect; like Tsiolkovsky, his work bridged Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union), and Alexander Pushkin (poet, playwright, and novelist). The pageant’s Soviet references included Yuri Gagarin, *Hedgehog in the Fog* (a 1975 Soviet film), the Russian “corn mowing machine” (invented by A. R. Vlasenko in Tsarist Russia but put into production by the Soviet Union), the Lunokhod lunar rover program, the Mir space station, the Sputnik-1 satellite, Sergei Eisenstein (filmmaker, director), the parachute (the first knapsack parachute was developed by Gleb Kotelnikov). Naturally, the more violent aspects of the October Revolution and Stalin’s regime were glossed over.<sup>260</sup>

After the pageant, the Sretensky Monastery Men’s Choir performed the Russian national anthem, with Russian (and formerly Soviet) cosmonauts bearing the flag.<sup>261</sup> The anthem itself represents a holdover from the Soviet Union. Commissioned by the Soviet Union to replace the Communist “Internationale” in 1944, “The Hymn of the Soviet Union” lyrics were initially dedicated to (and edited by) Stalin, as well as victory over the fascist Nazi invaders.<sup>262</sup> After Khrushchev’s “secret” denunciation of Stalin, the song lost its lyrics, becoming instrumental only until 1977, when the same lyricist (Sergey Mikhalkov) was commissioned to write new lyrics without the references to Stalin.<sup>263</sup> The Russian Federation under Yeltsin adopted a new national anthem, but in 2000 Putin reinstated the old national anthem with new lyrics by Mikhalkov, putting fresh words on

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<sup>260</sup> “The Complete Sochi 2014 Opening Ceremony | Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics,” YouTube video, 16 May 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKhuvriI8Rs>; citation applies to entire paragraph.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Gregory Freidin, “Russia and The Other: A Cultural Approach,” *Stanford University*, last accessed 23 February 2016, [https://web.stanford.edu/class/slavgen194a/hymn/anthem\\_history.htm](https://web.stanford.edu/class/slavgen194a/hymn/anthem_history.htm).

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

a very familiar tune.<sup>264</sup> From the flag of Peter the Great to the cosmonauts and the “Hymn of the Soviet Union,” there was very little that could be called “new” in the narrative of opening ceremonies.

## 2. Controversies

The Sochi Olympics had two types of narrative dissonance: protests from the West (primarily concerning the rights of homosexual athletes) and protests from within (environmentalists and political protesters, such as Pussy Riot). Putin dealt with each of these controversies in a predictable fashion, giving the slightest of nods to Western sensibilities regarding homosexuality while Russian protesters were savagely repressed.

### a. *Homosexuals Welcome, “But Leave the Children Alone, Please”*

The August 2013 law, forbidding “propaganda of homosexuality among minors,” was widely seen as an affront to homosexuals, both for attacking their sexual preference and for equating homosexuality with pedophilia.<sup>265</sup> Gay rights activists launched a campaign against the law, primarily using Western media to call for a boycott on the game.<sup>266</sup> The *RT* news website accused the U.S. of politicizing the games, arguing that the U.S. was sending “openly gay athletes” to show that “in their country gay rights have been established.”<sup>267</sup> Russian Orthodox Church officials pushed for stricter legislation, including the criminalization of homosexuality itself.<sup>268</sup> Putin did not revoke or change the law, but made it clear that homosexuals were welcome—yet he still needed to clarify by adding, “but leave the children alone, please.”<sup>269</sup> In the eyes of the Russian government, homosexuality appears to be just a step away from pedophilia.

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<sup>264</sup> Freidin, “Russia and The Other: A Cultural Approach.”

<sup>265</sup> “‘Leave Children Alone’ – Putin on Gay Rights in Russia,” *RT*, 18 January 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/putin-sochi-2014-volunteers-817/>.

<sup>266</sup> “Media Hype around Propaganda Law Has ‘Negative Effect’ on Russian LGBT Community,” *RT*, 4 February 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/sochi-media-negative-lgbt-616/>.

<sup>267</sup> “‘Leave Children Alone,’” *RT*.

<sup>268</sup> “Media Hype,” *RT*.

<sup>269</sup> “‘Leave Children Alone,’” *RT*.

***b. No Protests and No Riots; Profanity and Pussy Riot***

Putin's regime took indirect action to prevent protests from affecting the Olympics in any way. Environmental activists Suren Gazaryan and Evgeniy Vitishko were arrested and given three-year conditional sentences for "painting graffiti on a construction fence surrounding a dacha said to belong to the governor of the Krasnodar region, Aleksandr Tkachev," according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>270</sup> The two environmentalists were assigned a curfew and ordered to inform Russian authorities of their whereabouts and movements.<sup>271</sup> In November 2013, Vitishko was accused of violating his curfew twice, and a Russian court sentenced him to spend three years in the Tuapse penal colony.<sup>272</sup> The environmentalist appealed the decision, remaining free during the appeals process; until 3 February 2014, when he was placed in fifteen days of detention for "allegedly swearing in a public place."<sup>273</sup> As with other forms of suppression in Russia, there were no direct ties between the government and the actions of the courts.

Russia banned protests of and at the Olympics, in legislation that was used to justify cracking down on anything that might cast aspersions on the games.<sup>274</sup> Activists and the Western media attacked this policy, and Russia gave a slight concession: protests and rallies could be "staged only after agreeing with Sochi municipal authorities and the regional department of the Interior Ministry," according to the Kremlin press service.<sup>275</sup> Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina of Pussy Riot had been recently released by Putin after serving two years in a penal colony for their performance at Christ the

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<sup>270</sup> "Russia: Environmental Activist Threatened with New Charges," *Human Rights Watch*, 12 December 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/20/russia-environmental-activist-threatened-new-charges>.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> "Russia: Justice Fails Environment Activist at Appeal," *Human Rights Watch*, 12 February 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/12/russia-justice-fails-environment-activist-appeal>.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> "Putin Lifts Ban on Protests at Sochi Olympics, Orders Area Specially for Rallies," *RT*, 4 January 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/russia-lifts-ban-protests-172/>.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Savior Cathedral.<sup>276</sup> They travelled with their band to Sochi, to protest Putin's regime at the games. Prior to their performance in Sochi, the band was detained at their hotel for suspicion in a theft, and allegedly beaten by police afterwards.<sup>277</sup> At the protest, police and Cossacks took part in beating and detaining the band members—local police officials claimed that they only took “all necessary measures to stop the scuffle.”<sup>278</sup> The assaults on Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina continued after the Olympics, with attacks on 6 March and 14 March 2014.<sup>279</sup> These beatings and assaults could not be tied in any way to the government, but they occurred commonly enough to establish a pattern—even if they were not ordered, these attacks were allowed to continue.

### 3. Conclusion

The Olympics demonstrated that Putin's regime has not deviated much from the blueprints laid by Tsarist and Stalinist Russia. Modern communication and sentiment have forced Putin to couch his language at times, such as paying lip service to the rights of homosexuals while offering thinly-veiled insults. His attacks on dissenters have to be covert or legally justifiable, while never connected to his office directly. As much as the Olympics were trying to show a modern Russia, it revealed only that Russia has not yet truly changed its course.

### D. CONCLUSION

Putin's regime employs a mixture of Tsarist and Stalinist narratives, blending the two in an effort to keep the Russian people content despite the evidence of human rights violations. Traditionalist worship in the Russian Orthodox Church is not only permitted, but encouraged, while church officials ensure that their flock supports the current regime. Russia continues to pursue the status of a global power, in keeping with its inherited

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<sup>276</sup> “Pussy Riot Whipped by Cossacks in Sochi Performance Fail,” *RT*, 19 February 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/pussy-riot-sochi-cossacks-748/>; “Pussy Riot Crashes Olympics with New Song,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 20 February 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/pussy-riot-crashes-the-olympics-with-new-song/25271119.html>.

<sup>277</sup> “Pussy Riot Whipped,” *RT*.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> “Pussy Riot Members Assaulted Again,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 14 March 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/pussy-riot-members-assaulted-again/25296974.html>.

imperial status, putting the state at odds with the West and, in particular, NATO. A mixture of Pan-Slavism and irredentism is used to justify paramilitary and military operations in Russia's neighboring states, while the regime's detractors are silenced with Byzantine legal proceedings. In short, much of this regime's narrative has been borrowed.

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## **V. SCORECARD AND CONCLUSION**

Putin's narrative is closely aligned to the narratives of the Tsars and of Stalin's Soviet Union, creating a stagnant viewpoint even among the people that is unlikely to change readily. The population has more access to Western ideas and culture than ever before, but the modern Russian state has adapted, using television and the Internet to provide its own version of events and to further this narrative. Change is always a possibility, but at this point it seems to be a distant one.

### **A. SCORECARD: NARRATIVE CONTINUITIES**

Putin's regime shows an adaptation of every aspect of Tsarist and Stalinist narrative propagation, including censorship methods. These processes are not rarely manifested in the exact same manner—the regime seems to have adapted the various tools of previous regimes to fit today's world. Nevertheless, in almost every aspect Putin's regime shows a direct continuity with its predecessors.

#### **(1) Russian Orthodoxy**

Russian Orthodoxy has acted as both rival and partner under the Tsars, but were politically emasculated over time. The very term “Tsar” was enacted to show the head of state to not only be a political head, but also a sacral figure. Peter the Great further emasculated the church, removing the patriarchate and making the symbolic move of the capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg. In the Soviet Union, Lenin treated them as a rival during his reign; but under Stalin the church was re-established as a political asset for the state, with the extra benefit of being tied to the state's security apparatus. It is unclear how strongly the ties exist between the church and Russia's current security system, but Russian Orthodox leaders clearly support the current regime, even going so far as to claim Putin's presidency to be a “miracle of God.” Putin has not only kept the church as a political asset, but has regained some of the sacral reverence once reserved for the Tsar.

## (2) Great State

The Tsars defined Russia more by its imperial status than by a cultural one, leaning on military triumph and territorial expansion to claim its place among the European nations. The Soviet Union was a close parallel, claiming the military triumph over the Third Reich as perhaps its defining achievement, while maintaining a hegemony in Eastern Europe via the Warsaw Pact. The Russian Federation seemed to have lost its place in the once bipolar balance of power, but under Putin it has done its best to reclaim its status as a great power, creating frozen conflicts in neighboring states to maintain its hegemony.

## (3) Russianness

The concept of being Russia does not seem to have evolved much since the days of Catherine the Great. Lenin and Stalin downplayed Russian status (as opposed to Soviet citizenship), until the Great Patriotic War when Stalin exploited Russian sentimentality to motivate his Red Army. The ideas of Pan-Slavism and Russification seem to apply as much to the Russians of today as they did to the Russians under the Tsars; these ideas are often mingled with irredentism to justify Russia's conflict in neighboring states.

## (4) Cult of Personality

Alexander III and Nicholas II did not have full cults of personality, though they employed elements of mass media and propaganda to further their political power. Ultimately, these half-measures weakened the regime—it was not until Stalin's regime that the Russian people were exposed to a complete modern cult of personality. Putin seems to have adapted Stalin's model to fit today's world, using the majority of the same concepts, but bringing back the sacral image of the leader, while abandoning the closed borders of the Soviet system.

## (5) Censorship

Russia has never been long without intrusive state censorship. Under the Tsars, the system of destroying alternative narratives was extensive and official, coming from direct government orders. Stalin's system innovated, allowing the leader to not only veto



materials, but also to have a direct hand in the creative process itself. At the same time, the Soviet system hid its tracks, making it difficult to track official decisions that might backfire. Putin's regime operates in a similar fashion, suppressing alternative narratives indirectly while maintaining a distance between the leader himself and the methods of censorship.

## **B. CONCLUSION: BUSINESS AS USUAL, FOR NOW**

On the surface, Russia is a modern democracy, holding open elections to appoint its legislature and president. Based on Putin and Medvedev's continual regime, trading prime minister and presidential positions every one to two terms, it is unlikely that Putin will ever have to cede power during his lifetime. While Putin is leading the government, Russia is likely to maintain its current narrative and posture, pressing to further its image as a global power through a combination of frozen conflicts and aggressive media manipulation. Eventually, Putin will leave office, whether by resignation or other means. When that happens, the Russian Federation may have a chance to move toward a more liberal democracy. Nevertheless, the narrative that has been propagated and maintained from the time of the Tsars until the present day is unlikely to permit such a shift to occur quickly or easily.

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## **APPENDIX. VIRGIN MARY, PUT PUTIN AWAY (PUNK PRAYER)**

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away

Put Putin away, put Putin away

(End chorus)

Black robe, golden epaulettes

All parishioners crawl to bow

The phantom of liberty is in heaven

Gay-pride sent to Siberia in chains

The head of the KGB, their chief saint,

Leads protesters to prison under escort

In order not to offend His Holiness

Women must give birth and love

Shit, shit, the Lord's shit!

Shit, shit, the Lord's shit!

(Chorus)

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, become a feminist

Become a feminist, become a feminist

(End chorus)

The Church's praise of rotten dictators  
The cross-bearer procession of black limousines  
A teacher-preacher will meet you at school  
Go to class - bring him money!

Patriarch Gundyaev believes in Putin  
Bitch, better believe in God instead  
The belt of the Virgin can't replace mass-meetings  
Mary, Mother of God, is with us in protest!

(Chorus)

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away  
Put Putin away, put Putin away  
(End chorus)<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013), 13–14.

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